From myth to symbol : the nineteenth century interpretation of Prometheus

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From Myth to Symbol: The Nineteenth-Century Interpretations of Prometheus

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research project is to examine the evolution of the various interpretations of the Prometheus figure during the 19th century, leading to the Symbolist period, which appears as the coronation of the Titan. Symbolism being a period animated by the dream of a fusion between the arts, a transdisciplinary approach was chosen, encompassing comparative literature, history of art, and music. This reflects the Symbolist approach to art, and is the basis of an analysis of the importance taken by Prometheus in the 19th century, when the focus on the Titan shifted from the myth to the symbol.

After an introductory chapter briefly detailing the constitution of the Prometheus myth and persona before the 19th century, the thesis will examine how Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's works on Prometheus were the first to radically change the perception of the Titan, by establishing him both as a creator and a rebel freed from any form of guilt. The same chapter will demonstrate how, for Shelley and Byron, Prometheus was associated with the "Romantic Revolution", and how he was used by Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac as a mask for the artist. This leads, in the third chapter, to a consideration of Prometheus in relation to the Symbolist crisis of faith in Europe, and to the Symbolist syncretism which arose from it. Eventually, in the last chapter, the many faces of Prometheus which emerged during the Symbolist period will be analysed: his association with Jesus Christ; the German vitalist Prometheus; his superimposition with Pygmalion in England; and as a prism for the total artwork, as seen in the works of Frantisek Kupka and Alexander Scriabin.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- T.P.L.E: Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne, by Raymond Trousson, Droz, Genève, 1964, 1976, 2001
- P.H.M.: Prométhée, Histoire du mythe, de ses origins orientales à ses incarnations modernes, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2000
- M.P.: Le Mythe de Prométhée, by Louis Séchan, PUF, Paris, 1951, 1985

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The contemporary apprehension of the Prometheus figure is a paradoxical one, inasmuch as it is based on a latent fascination so great that Gaston Bachelard named what is increasingly considered as one of the most important complexes in psychology the "Prometheus complex", that is, "all the tendencies which push us to know as much as our fathers, more than our fathers, as much as our masters, more than our masters".[1] As Bachelard otherwise put it, considering the fascination of lighting and mastering a fire, "the child wants to do like his father, far from his father, and like a small Prometheus, he steals matches".[2] However, in spite of the similarity the Prometheus complex apparently has with the Œdipus complex, Bachelard insists on the fact that the sexual parameter linked to the Prometheus complex is not as direct and as strong as the one that is linked to the Œdipus complex, and advances that "the Prometheus complex is the Œdipus complex of intellectual life".[3] The reason for the effect of the Prometheus myth on the human psyche surely derives from the fact that it draws its evocative power from two elemental forces endowed with symbolic functions: fire, and the notion of transgression. This could explain the development of mixed attitudes towards, and fascination with, the Prometheus figure. He brought fire to mankind: fire of life and creation, flame of knowledge and civilisation; but at the same time, Prometheus' gift is an original infringement, and a threat to the order of creation. Prometheus is the benefactor of mankind, but he is also, par excellence, the one "who plays with fire", and who, together with his beloved creatures, is punished for doing so. In this respect, it is particularly revealing that the adjective

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[1] In La psychanalyse du feu, by Gaston Bachelard, Gallimard, 1949, p.30. My translation
[2] *Ibid.*, p.29
[3] *Ibid.*, p.31

"Promethean", depending on the language used, can apply both to an act against ethics, and to courageous action.

Given the cultural and symbolic importance of the Prometheus myth in Western civilisation, one can be surprised by the relatively few studies that have been devoted to the Titan. Raymond Trousson, in the first edition of Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne,[4] of 1964, makes the same statement. After his minute and almost comprehensive inventory of the treatments of the theme, it may be that literature researchers felt that another study was bound to be redundant. However, in 1972, Jacqueline Duchemin also made a very important contribution to the study of the myth, adopting a different approach from Trousson's thematology: that of comparative mythology. I am much indebted to those two essential studies, as I am to Louis Séchan's brief but fundamental Le Mythe de Prométhée.[5] Unfortunately, to this day, none of those three fundamental works on Prometheus have been translated into English. All the quotations from those works transcribed in this thesis are therefore my translations, as are all the quotations from the French material that was used. In this respect, the work of Raymond Trousson in particular will occasionally be quoted at length, with the aim of selecting and highlighting the importance of his research in the field.

However essential these three works are for the study of the Prometheus myth, the subject, aim, and method of the present thesis differ greatly from those in the works mentioned above. Séchan's study concentrates on the origins of the myth, whereas

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[4] Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne, by Raymond Trousson, Droz, Genève, 1964, 1976, 2001

[5] Le Mythe de Prométhée, by Louis Séchan, PUF, Paris, 1951

Trousson and Duchemin focus on the general evolution of the myth throughout literary history. Trousson opted for a monumental and quasi-encyclopaedic inventory of the occurrences of the myth, whereas Duchemin adopted what to her was the clearest way of emphasising the orientation the Prometheus myth took, that is, a succession of monographs. Thus, with two very different approaches, their primary concern was the progression of the mythical material from a historical perspective. This latter aspect is indeed essential to consider the protean aspect of the myth, and constitutes the frame of the present thesis. However, unlike Trousson's and Duchemin's studies, this is not a history of the Prometheus myth as such. Indeed, it took as a starting point the observation that, for Symbolism, Prometheus represented a prism on which the arts and a great number of ideals converged, as was also the case with Orpheus and Salomé. Whereas to this day, many valuable studies have been devoted to the two latter characters, the Symbolist Prometheus has been left aside. The present piece of work is therefore an attempt to research this particular treatment of the mythological character.

In terms of construction and methodology, other studies of mythological figures have been a great source of inspiration for the present work, and in particular the invaluable Orpheus in the nineteenth century,[6] by Dorothy Kosinski, The Sappho History,[7] by Margaret Reynolds, and Pandora's Box,[8] by Dora and Erwin Panofsky. Pygmalion and Galatea: the History of a Narrative in English Literature,[9] by Essaka

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[6] Orpheus in Nineteenth Century Symbolism, by Dorothy Kosinski, U.M.I Research Press, London, 1989
[7] The Sappho History, by Margaret Reynolds, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003
[8] Pandora's Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol, by Dora and Erwin Panofsky, Bollinger Foundation, New York, 1962
[9] Pygmalion and Galatea: the History of a Narrative in English Literature, by Essaka Joshua, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2001.

Joshua, was also a point of reference, notably for the construction of the first section of the present thesis. Wider studies which were not exclusively devoted to Prometheus, but which put his figure into new perspectives, also proved to be very stimulating. A notably precious work was a short but insightful book by Dominique Lecourt, entitled Prométhée, Faust, Frankenstein, Fondements imaginaires de l'éthique,[10] which has the merit of outlining the extent of Prometheus' influence in the arts. The Sin of Knowledge, Ancient Themes and Modern Variations,[11] by the scholar Theodore Ziolkowski, also examined the figures of Prometheus and Faust in a discerning way, and added to this comparison the study of Adam. As can be seen from those two titles, the combined study of Prometheus, Faust, and Adam is a very favoured one,[12] which has been carried through with expertise, and which will therefore be excluded from this thesis. For similar reasons, we shall not linger on the parallels established between Satan[13] and Prometheus. Indeed, rather than examining the Prometheus figure exclusively through the scope and theme of transgression, which is the underlying link between the Titan, Faust, Satan and Adam, we shall consider all the nuances brought to Prometheus' persona thanks to the evolution of the mythical material. Rather than isolating and separating elements from the myth, we shall try to grasp its essential protean quality.

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[10] Prométhée, Faust, Frankenstein, Fondements imaginaires de l'éthique, by Dominique Lecourt, Le livre de poche, Biblio essais, Paris, 1996

[11] The Sin of Knowledge, Ancient Themes and Modern Variations by Theodore Ziolkowski, Princeton University, Princeton, 2000

[12] See, also, Prometheus and Faust: The Promethean Revolt in Drama from Classical Antiquity to Goethe, by Timothy Richard Wutrich, Greenwood, Westport, 1995

[13] Confused with Lucifer, which comes from the latin "lucem ferre", bringer, or bearer of light. One can refer to Lucifer and Prometheus, a Study of Milton's Satan, by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, Routledge, 1999, which is particularly insightful.

In this respect, the present work was first intended as a study of the artistic and cultural projections onto the Prometheus figure, questioning why such a phenomenon occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. Because Symbolism succeeds Romanticism, and stems from it, the core of this thesis starts with Goethe, with whom the apprehension of the Prometheus myth radically changed, paving the way for the Romantic and Symbolist interpretations. With one of the pillars of Symbolism being the dream of a fusion between the arts, a methodological choice was made to consider and evaluate the Prometheus figure in literature, and art, as well as in music. To use the image of the prism again, a thesis on such a subject would have been incomplete or unfaithful to the Symbolist spirit had it not envisaged all the rays converging on Prometheus, especially at a time when communications between the arts and artists were so numerous. For the same reason I decided to take into account most of Symbolist Europe: England, France, Belgium and Germany. The reader will also notice in the structure of this thesis that the musical, literary, and pictorial treatments of Prometheus are rarely all present in the same section. Hence the dominance of literature and history of art in the first section, a clear literary and musical dominance in the second section, and the supremacy of cultural and pictorial studies in the last two sections. This dividing is not a methodological choice, but a reflection of the loose chronological frame given to this thesis in order to follow the evolution of the Prometheus figure. Indeed, it turns out that composers, poets, writers and painters were not necessarily inspired by the Prometheus subject at the same time.

At that stage of this thesis, it is also crucial to mention, for clarification purposes, that Prometheus was used as an allegory for the progress of science and materialism,

especially when the Industrial Revolution came into full bloom. This allegory, based on the symbolic power of fire, must not be confused with the way in which late eigteenth century and nineteenth century artists made a symbol of Prometheus. The allegory is based on a reduction process, from an abstract idea to a conventional and fixed image, whereas the symbol is by essence open and bound to evolve. The meaning and the form taken by this allegory of Prometheus have never changed as such, even if its users were varied: from Positivists to Russian Socialists. Prometheus extolled the omnipotence of science and industry, becoming a model similar to Stakhanov for workers in the early twentieth century. With the great development of genetics, it is interesting to notice that this interpretation of Prometheus prevails nowadays, the adjective "Promethean", in most European languages, being applied to scientists "playing with fire", with unlimited and potentially dangerous scientific powers. Phrased differently, the adjective is applied to modern Frankensteins, the superior power transgressed being ethics, rather than God. We shall have to bear in mind that such an interpretation of Prometheus existed, but because it was antagonistic to the Symbolist interpretation, we shall not examine its various uses. However, one can refer to the fifth chapter[14] of Thedore Ziolkowski's work, which looks into the history of this allegory up to modern times.

One of the first difficulties arising from its subject is its reliance on the notion of myth, and on the clarification of the definition of myth. The numerous definitions (ethnological, psychoanalytical, anthropological, etc...) ascribed to the myth are indeed confusing. The current use of the word myth, referring to an object or an

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[14] "The Proletarisarization of Prometheus", in The Sin of Knowledge, Ancient Themes and Modern Variations, by Theodore Ziolkowski, Princeton University, Princeton, 2000, pp.111-148

individual which is the product of imagination, or whose actual existence is not verifiable, is largely responsible for such a confusion. An examination of the etymology of the word "myth" does not necessarily clear up these difficulties. The Greek origin of "myth", "muthos", which means "speech", seems to be inevitably coupled with "logos" (rational speech), an association which falsifies the value of the myth. Unfortunately, through this opposition, the myth soon becomes a narrative relying on imagination, and therefore devoid of truth, when compared with an expression of rationality. Thus, resorting to etymology is particularly misleading, since one of the specific qualities of myth is to be a unifying cultural element, recognised by society as true. In the absence of a definite definition of myth, which would constitute an impossible task, let us set forth some of its characteristics.

The myth is a narrative of sacred origin, which relates events as they would have happened in an indeterminate time in the past. Because of its oral and indefinite origins, the myth is not the produce of an individual. It has a collective ownership, and it is created by this group. This explains why a myth is in essence protean: it evolves throughout history, depending on mentalities, cultural, moral, and religious values. We shall see that a myth can be ignored or can fall into oblivion for a period of time, before being revived by a society which will project itself onto it. It could be said that man, like Prometheus, shapes myths to his own image, and that a society measures itself through them. Another essential element concerning myths is that turning to them is also a questioning of origins, since, as Mircea Eliade put it, "we must never forget that one of the essential functions of the myth is its provision of an

opening into the Great Time, a periodic re-entry into Time primordial"[15]. We shall come back to some of the specific qualities linked to myths in the core of the thesis, especially in an examination of the value which nineteenth century artists imputed to myths. However, it is important to mention at this point of this study, that in the nineteenth century context of the "mal du siècle", or world weariness, one of the reasons why a strong interest was shown in myths was that "the modern world – in crisis ever since its profound break with Christianity– is in quest of a new myth, which alone could enable it to draw upon fresh spiritual resources and renew its creative powers".[16] The nineteenth century interest in myths was certainly, above all, a need for the sacred.

To understand the originality of the nineteenth century interpretations of the Prometheus myth, a choice was made, in an introductory chapter, to examine its history briefly, from the beginnings to the nineteenth century: the origins of the myth, and the constitution of what we shall call Prometheus' persona, the fortune of Prometheus from Antiquity to Christianity, and the crucial period of the Renaissance, during which a rediscovery of the Prometheus figure was witnessed. We shall see that, until Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe and the *Sturm und Drang*, the interpretations of Prometheus largely relied on this impetus brought into being by the Renaissance.

The second chapter, which inaugurates the core of the thesis, opens with Goethe and the *Sturm und Drang*. Even though Goethe's tremendously influential poem Prometheus dates from 1774, and his dramatic fragment bearing the same title from

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[15] In Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, by Mircea Eliade, translated by Philip Mairet, Fontana Collins Library, 1968, p.34
[16] *Ibid.*, p.25

1773, it would have been a methodological mistake to separate the study of these works from that of Romanticism. Goethe might not have been a Romantic but, to a certain extent, he defined and shaped Romanticism, especially during his *Sturm und Drang* period. We shall see that this is particularly true of the treatment of Prometheus, since its nineteenth century interpretations rely on the turning point derived from the work of Goethe, on the new light that the German writer cast on the Titan. After this study, and that of the musical pieces inspired by Goethe, we shall examine the Romantic appropriation of the Prometheus figure, by Byron and Shelley, and by Hugo and Balzac, who both identified the type of the artist with Prometheus.

Chapter three will explore the Symbolist understanding of the Prometheus myth. In a first contextual section, in the absence of a precise definition of Symbolism, I shall attempt to show that it was not a movement but a spirit essentially characterised by a crisis of faith which encompassed Æstheticism and Decadence. This will lead us to draw a map of Symbolist Europe, outlining the variations taken by Symbolism depending on the various cultural, political, and religious climates. Eventually, we will examine the Symbolist apprehension of the myth. In the two following sections, we will consider how Prometheus was used in two different ways by Symbolists as an answer to this crisis of faith. First, we shall see that in Germany, following the "twilight of the gods", Prometheus was used as a symbol for the start of a new era, that of mankind. In the last section, the focus will be on Prometheus at the heart of the Symbolist syncretism, particularly in France and in Belgium, where the religious crisis was especially strong.

In a last chapter, after my attempt to situate Prometheus within the Symbolist constellation, I made the methodological choice to examine the main projections which were made of the Prometheus figure, through the study of the artistic works which were devoted to the Titan. The first two sections will appear as developments and illustrations of the previous chapter, with a study of Gustave Moreau and of the variations on the German vitalist Prometheus. In the third section, we shall examine one of the most original masks taken by Prometheus, in England, where a cross-fertilisation of the Prometheus myth by the Pygmalion myth occurred. In the fourth and final section, we shall study the coronation of the Symbolist Prometheus by the last Symbolist generation, with Frantisek Kupka and Alexander Scriabin.

I. Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century

"Man achieves a state of awareness in which he is no longer trying to revenge himself on a tyrant he has created, and so is no longer divided against himself."[17]

Myth is essentially linked to language: transmitted through generations, it appears as the cultural and historical product *par excellence*. This is why in order to understand the nineteenth century interpretations of the Prometheus myth and the specificity of the changes that occurred at that time, especially during its last decades, it seems impossible not to examine, however briefly, the way in which the Prometheus myth constituted itself through history. Such a procedure is actually essential to underline

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[17] In "Prometheus: The Romantic Revolutionary", A Study of English Romanticism, by Northrop Frye, The Harvester Press Limited, 1968, p.110

the evolution and consistency of Prometheus as a figure. However, given that our study is leading to the nineteenth century and notably to Symbolism, we shall concentrate on elements of the myth's history that are essential to the understanding of this period and its artistic development. We shall therefore leave aside centuries during which the myth, or Prometheus' persona, did not evolve as such, in a way in which they would have influenced its nineteenth century interpretations. Similarly, we shall leave aside or only briefly mention great literary figures[18] if their treatment of the myth did not have further repercussions, or modify the general shape of the myth. To make an exhaustive account of all the treatments of the Prometheus myth in history would be an impossible task, but Raymond Trousson, in his work entitled Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne,[19] makes a very detailed survey to which one can refer for specific information about the evolution of the Prometheus theme from Antiquity.

In order to clarify the study of the origins of the Prometheus myth that we now have to undertake, I shall turn towards the work of Martin Day,[20] who has elaborated an interesting approach to the myths, which will be most useful for our purpose. Indeed, he distinguishes three different levels in the constitution of myths: first, at their roots, the archaic myth, which essentially relies on oral tradition; the intermediate myth, the product of a 'highly conscious artist, dominated by aesthetic impulses and intent upon neat, attractive telling of a good story';[21] and, eventually, the derivative myth, which will be our main concern. Before examining that last level, it is relevant to first

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[18] Such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
[19] Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne, by Raymond Trousson, Genève, 1964, 1976, 2001
[20] The Many Meanings of Myth, by Martin Day, Lanham, Maryland, 1984
[21] *Ibid.*, p.5

examine the etymology of "Prometheus" before studying the "archaic" and "intermediate" forms of the Prometheus myth.

1. *"Archaic" and "Intermediate" Myths, or the Primitive Constitution of the Prometheus Myth.*

a. Etymology and "Archaic" Myth

Prometheus means "the fore thinker", and/or a man with "foresight" in Greek. The name derives from the Indo-European root " man", extended to "man-dh", a seme containing the idea of thought, wisdom, and reflection. In this respect, Prometheus is opposed to his brother Epimetheus ("hindsight"), the clumsy character who does not think until after the event. The two brothers are so antithetical that Kérényi named Epimetheus "Prometheus' left hand".[22] The two brothers are so tightly linked in the first accounts of the myth that Kérényi assumed that there would originally have been a unique hybrid being, Epimetheus-Prometheus, which would have engendered mankind, a creature altogether close to Plato's androgyne. As we can see, the only etymological considerations about the name Prometheus already throw us into the myth itself. The admirable studies of the sources of the myth by Louis Séchan[23] and by Jacqueline Duchemin[24] fully explore the possible origins of Prometheus, through the method of comparative mythology. It is not our purpose to reproduce such analyses here, which would also be far beyond our competence. We would just like to

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[22] In Mythologie des grecs, by Karl Kérényi, Payot, Paris, 1952, and in Le Fripon divin, by Carl Gustav Jung, Karl Kérényi, and Paul Radin, translated by Arthur Reiss, Georg, Geneva, 1958

[23] Le Mythe de Prométhée, by Louis Séchan, PUF, Paris , 1951, 1985

[24] Prométhée, histoire du mythe, de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes, by Jacqueline Duchemin, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2000

throw light on the main traits of Prometheus, those that conditioned his later evolution as a persona. Though, as Jacqueline Duchemin puts it, we could find the origin of Prometheus three millenaries before our era in Sumerio-Babylonian accounts,[25] we will concentrate on the Greek sources of the myth, that is, in Martin Day's words, on the "archaic" myth.

The son of the Titan Iapetus and Klymene, Prometheus is traditionally presented as the brother of Menoetius, Atlas, and Epimetheus. When Iapetus led the war against the Olympian gods, amongst his sons, only Prometheus and Epimetheus sided with the Olympians. It is interesting to see that Wilamowitz[26] assumes that, originally, there were two different Prometheus: on the one side the Ionian-attic Prométhos, founder of Kodridè, husband of Asia or Hésioné. He was idolised in Athens during the Prométhéia. Indeed, Prométhos was venerated during the torchlight run, which essentially celebrated the god or demon of ceramics (and not the fire-giver). He was the patron deity of potters in Athens. Such a craft implying the mastery of fire, he was soon associated with another deity, presented as his youngest brother Hephaestus in this region, along with whom he had an altar in the Academy with Athena (patroness of the arts and crafts). He is the one who would have aided Zeus to get over a terrible headache by splitting his skull in two in order to give birth to Athena, and would also have shaped Pandora, before creating all human beings. In no sense does he steal the fire from Zeus to aid men. He is not the enemy of the Kronide and does not incur celestial punishment. As Louis Séchan notes,[27] these features would belong to the

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[25] *Ibid.*, pp.33-44
[26] In Aischylos Interpretationen, by Ulrich Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Berlin, 1914, p.138
[27] In Le Mythe de Prométhée, by Louis Séchan, PUF, Paris, 1951, 1985, p.13

second Prometheus, the Boeotian-Locrian one, whose name, eventually, predominated. He was Hesiod's Prometheus, who also partly inspired Æschylus. Prometheus' duality was to be of great importance. In actual fact, it determined two precise features of the Titan: Prometheus plasticator and Prometheus the fire-giver, two facets of the Titan which would determine the evolution of his persona. Let us now consider the "intermediate" myth of Prometheus, through the accounts of Hesiod and Æschylus, who both crucially shaped Prometheus' persona.

b. The constitution of Prometheus' persona through the intermediate myth

Prometheus the Fire-Giver

Hesiod's account of the Prometheus myth in his Theogony[28](lines 507-516) relates that in Mekonè, where gods and mortals used to meet during the golden age, Prometheus, who wanted to trick Zeus, carved up an ox for the feast, and divided it into two portions. He covered the best pieces with the ox's gut, and decorated the bones with enticing white fat. Then, the Titan asked Zeus to choose between the two portions, the god naturally pointing at the inferior one. Furious, Zeus forbade mankind from receiving the gift of fire, therefore indirectly punishing Prometheus. However, the account does not end here. Determined to ensure that men would benefit from a civilised life, Prometheus stole fire in a fennel stalk to give it to man. In order to punish Prometheus, together with mankind, Zeus sent the first woman amongst them, created by Hephaestus and attractively dressed by Athena, and Prometheus was chained to a pillar, where his unending torture was to be carried out. Each day, an

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[28] In Theogony. Work and Days. Shield., by Hesiod, translated and edited by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1983

eagle was to tear out his liver, which would regrow every night to let the bird devour it anew. An interesting point, in the Theogony, is the mention of Epimetheus, associated with Pandora, who in this work by Hesiod is not yet given a name. Indeed, Epimetheus is referred to as the one to blame for "the unhappiness of men eating bread, by being the first to receive under his roof the virgin formed by Zeus" (lines 512-514), and not Prometheus.

The persona of Prometheus in Works and Days[29] is very different, the Titan being presented by Hesiod as the one responsible for man's misery. Indeed, as Theodore Ziolkowski puts it, whereas "in the Theogony, Prometheus appears midway in the divine genealogy as a god cast out for reasons described in lavish detail, in the human context of Works and Days, in contrast, he stands at the beginning of human history as the source of man's grief and misery".[30] In actual fact, Prometheus is punished for being a trickster and breaking the law. Far from being the benefactor of mankind, he is the one to blame for its fall:

Son of Iapetos, there is none craftier than you,

And you rejoice at tricking my wits and stealing the fire

Which will be a curse to you and to the generations that follow.

The price for the stolen fire will be a gift of evil

To charm the hearts of all men as they hug their own doom.[31] (lines 55-59)

Such a contrast between the two works might be explained by the nature of Works and Days, a moral poem addressed to Hesiod's brother, Perses, who was in need of

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[29] *Ibid.*
[30] In The Sin of Knowledge, Ancient Themes and Modern Variations, by Theodore Ziolkowski, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000, p.29
[31] *Ibid.*, p.30

guidance in this regard. The very focus of the poem, which deals mainly with Pandora, is also an element of explanation for the shift in Prometheus' persona. Because he is responsible for the existence of Pandora, he is also consequently responsible for the misery following her arrival on Earth.

In any case, we can see that Prometheus' characteristic role as the benefactor of mankind does not derive from Hesiod. The specific quality of the Titan which Hesiod emphasised through the gift of fire was trickery. In this regard, it is worth noting, with Louis Séchan,[32] that Æschylus took the opposing view of Hesiod on the Prometheus myth. Indeed, where Hesiod emphasised the loss of the golden age, Æschylus saw the Titan as the initiator of progress.

Prometheus the Rebel

« Chez Hésiode, l'être humain était étroitement assujetti aux dieux;

dans le Prométhée, il se forge un destin. » [33]

Although artistic depictions of Prometheus flourished during the sixth century, Prometheus did not inspire many writers, and, in spite of a few comic treatments of the myth, detailed by Jacqueline Duchemin,[34] this period did not determine the evolution of the Prometheus myth. Greater, not to say tremendous, was the influence of Æschylus on the treatment of the myth and the development of Prometheus as a persona. It is fruitful to notice that, before writing the influential Prometheus Unbound, Æschylus had written another play entitled Prometheus the Firelighter, which belonged to the Greek "satyrical" genre. This play was probably performed in

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[32] In Le Mythe de Prométhée, (M.P.) by Louis Séchan, Puf, Paris, 1951, 1985, p.28

[33] In Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne, (T.P.L.E.) by Raymond Trousson, Droz, Genève, 1964, 1976, 2001 p.51 " With Hesiod, the human being was tightly subjected to gods; in Prometheus Unbound, he created a destiny for himself"

[34] In Prométhée, histoire du mythe de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes, (P.H.M.) by Jacqueline Duchemin, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2000, pp. 88-95

472 BC, the same year as the Persians. This leads Jacqueline Duchemin to assume that because "the first play the Prometheus legend inspired Æschylus to write was not a tragedy, but a satyrical drama, [...] we could therefore be tempted to think that he was the first to treat the subject in a tragic way, and that he certainly did so at the end of his life"[35], an assumption which is appealing but not necessarily convincing. However, the play which determined the evolution of the Prometheus myth was Prometheus Bound, and before starting the examination of the play itself and its impact on the constitution of the Prometheus myth, we have to underline the fact that this play remains problematic, for three main reasons.

First, Hellenic scholars[36] still discuss the authenticity of Prometheus Bound, even though it has been attributed to Æschylus since the third century BC. This debate is sustained by the fact that Æschylus, a man of strong faith, truly believed in the justice of Zeus and in universal harmony. The Suppliants, the Orestia, or the Persians clearly show us that, to the Greek playwright, there was a coincidence between Zeus and Anankè (the Aeshylean concept of destiny or necessity, deprived of the concept of determinism). Æschylus believed in an absolute justice. Therefore, the appearance of Zeus as a tyrant in Prometheus Bound is difficult to justify in the light of the depiction of the god in Æschylus' other plays. Nonetheless, if we admit, with Raymond Trousson, that law could not be on both sides in Æschylus' thought, "from now on, the divine order could not [...] be conceived but as an evolution; [...] gods, like men,

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[35] *Ibid.*, p.87

[36] See A History of Greek Literature, by M. Hadas, p.81; The Greek Tragic Poets, by D.W.Lucas, p.91; Greek Tragedy, by G.Norwood, pp.91-92; Le Mythe de Prométhée, by Louis Séchan, p.23; Eschyle, by M. Delcourt, p.63, T.P.L.E., pp. 42-43

[37] In T.P.L.E, p.42

are constantly evolving, and learn justice".[38] In this respect, Æschylus would not be entirely critical of the gods. He would just underline their journey towards pure and absolute justice. This point naturally leads us to a second problematic aspect, linked to Prometheus Bound, and this is its situation within Æschylus' trilogy.

Indeed, the evolution of Zeus as a character could be understood in the perspective of the depiction of Zeus' progression as a benevolent and forgiving god.[39] In this regard, the main issue concerning these hypotheses lies in the fact that we have only fragments of the two other plays constituting the supposed Prometheia. Therefore, we cannot exactly determine the nature of the link between Prometheus Bound, Prometheus Unbound (Prometheus Lyomenos) and Prometheus the Fire-Bringer (Prometheus Porphyros), also ascribed to Æschylus in Antiquity. It was long believed that Prometheus Bound was the first play of the trilogy, Prometheus Unbound the second, and Prometheus the Fire-Bringer the final one, but a few recent critics have put forward the idea that Prometheus the Fire-Bringer could be the first play. As a result of the two issues mentioned above, we are unable to establish, both for religious and stylistic reasons, whether Prometheus Bound came early or late within Æschylus' production. However important these three elements are, in the perspective of the constitution of the myth as we know it, we shall limit our observation to the reception and perception of the works. We shall therefore assume, like the readers of the

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[38] In T.P.L.E, p.42

[39] Phillip Vellacott, in his introduction to Prometheus Bound, Penguin Classics, London, 1961, p.9, mentions that "There can be little doubt that by the end of the trilogy Zeus himself abandoned the use of force and opened negotiations with Prometheus, who then told him of the prophecy concerning the sea-nymph Thetis; that Heracles, with the permission of Zeus, set Prometheus free, perhaps first shooting the eagle with his bow; that the centaur Chiron, longing for death in the agonies of the wound Heracles had inflicted, was allowed to lose his immortality and descend to Hades, thus 'taking on himself the pains of Prometheus' in fulfilment of prophecy; and that the final settlement recognised the supremacy of Zeus, the right of the human race to exist and develop, and the superiority of reason to violence."

nineteenth century, that Æschylus was the author of Prometheus Bound, a work which was part of a trilogy.

In Prometheus Bound, the angle from which Prometheus is viewed appears as very different from that of Hesiod. The trickery of Mekonè is not mentioned, and the only responsibility of Prometheus is the gift of fire to mankind, an act that took up only nine lines in the Theogony. As Theodore Ziolkowski notes, "nor does Æschylus refer to Pandora or Epimetheus; Prometheus alone must pay the penalty for his crime".[40] The shift of focus in the myth is not without consequences: Prometheus' act of rebellion against Zeus takes a new significance, as the god is referred to as a "new god" (line 439), without much legitimacy, inasmuch as he killed his father Kronos, and governs as a "tyrant" (line 10). The opposition of the Titan, in this context, means much more than pure trickery, and appears as a conflict of values. Although Zeus does not actually come into sight on stage, it is interesting to see who his henchmen are: Kratos and Bia, that is to say Strength and Violence, the two pillars of tyranny. The very change in Zeus' image entails a revaluation of Prometheus and his theft. In Prometheus Bound, Prometheus is no longer motivated by his intention to trick Zeus, but by his love for mankind. In the first act of the play, Prometheus is told:

Each changing hour will bring successive pain to rack
Your body; and no man yet born shall set you free.

Your kindness to the human race has earned you this.[41]

Trickery is not the end of his actions. Prometheus is certainly the victim of his hubris in Prometheus Bound (the word authadia, which means "wilful stubbornness", is

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[40] In The Sin of Knowledge, by Theodore Ziolkowski, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000, p.36
[41] In Prometheus Bound, by Æschylus, Penguin Classics, 1961, p.21

omnipresent in the play), but nobility is attached to his character. Twice in the play, the first time line 11 and the second line 28, his "philanthropic turn" is mentioned. Indeed, in Æschylus' play, he is the proper saviour of mankind, since, in lines 232-233, Prometheus informs the chorus that Zeus intended to eradicate mankind from the Earth. Only the Titan decided to save them from death. In this context, the theft of fire takes a new significance. As Prometheus notes it himself,

I am harnessed in this torturing clamp. For I am he

Who hunted out the source of fire, and stole it, packed

In pith of a dry fennel-stalk. And fire has proved

For men a teacher in every art, their grand resource.

That was the sin for which I now pay the full price,

Bared to the winds of heaven, bound and crucified.[42]

Even at this early stage of the evolution of the myth, fire becomes the symbol for knowledge, the arts and sciences, which are the means of civilisation. Therefore, by bringing fire to mankind, Prometheus appears as the great educator of men, as a sort of spiritual father. Before his intervention, as well as being brutish, men had no proper conscience.

Mindless, I gave them mind and reason [...]

In those days, they had eyes, but sight was meaningless

Heard sounds, but could not listen; all their length of life

They passed like shapes in dreams, confused and purposeless.[43]

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[42] *Ibid.*, p.24
[43] *Ibid.*, p.34

According to Æschylus, Prometheus is responsible for the awakening of conscience in men. Æschylus also strongly emphasises another of the Titan's gifts to men, which is their "blind hopes" (line 250). Such a gift could be considered as a curse, but is in fact very meaningful. In actual fact, Prometheus claims that, through this present, he delivered men from their obsession with death. As Trousson notes,[44] he preserved them from the feeling of absurdity, and "gave them the illusion of the value of dynamism and action, together with the ambition to be free". In this respect, Æschylus depicts this gift, which at the outset seems anything but a present, as one of the main traits of man.

Another key-element brought out by Æschylus' tragedy – in which lies the dramatic aspect of the play – is Prometheus' secret. Indeed, Prometheus "the forethinker" knows what could be the destiny of Zeus. He actually reveals that he "Shall yet be needed by the Lord of Immortals to disclose the new design, tell him who it is/ Shall rob him of his power and his glory." Prometheus adds, "Nor shall I cower under his fierce threats, or tell this secret,/ Until he free me from these brutal bonds/ And consent to compensate me for his outrage."[45]

Indeed, later in the play, Zeus sends Hermes to enquire into this element, crucial for the action of Prometheus Bound, since we must not forget that the main character of the play is totally motionless. The secret Prometheus holds, which is that the child that Zeus will have with Thetis will overthrow him, will have a tremendous importance for the further developments of the myth. Indeed, Zeus' offspring, who

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[44] In T.P.L.E., p.48

[45] In Prometheus Bound, by Æschylus, translated with an introduction by Philip Vellacott, Penguin Classics, 1961, p.26

will be named Demogorgon by Shelley, will be the precondition for Prometheus' and mankind's liberation in the Romantic play. This analysis of Æschylus' play is elementary, but its aim is to highlight what was its contribution to the constitution of the myth. We now have to examine a last major trait of Prometheus' persona, which also appeared in Ancient Greece, even though later than the two elements previously studied.

Prometheus Plasticator

It is worth noting that the Athenians, though fascinated by Prometheus, did not represent him as the creator of mankind. In order to explain what could be seen as paradoxical, Louis Séchan makes the assumption that the people of Athens were probably even more attached to the idea of the City's autochthony than to Prometheus.[46] In studying Prometheus Bound, we can notice that, through the gift of the fire of knowledge, Prometheus appears as a spiritual father for mankind. But this trait of Prometheus was soon to take a literal significance in the myth. Prometheus' role as a creator was to become as important as his role as a fire-bringer. We cannot include in this study an analysis of all the ancient texts referring to Prometheus as a creator[47]. However, we can mention that Aesop[48] would have been the first to depict Prometheus as a creator. We then have to wait for the fourth-century comedies by Philemon[49] and Menander[50] to see Prometheus forming men and animals from earth.

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[46] In M.P., p.33
[47] For instance, Æsop, Fabulae, 124, Prometheus and Men ; Apollodorus, Library, I, 7; Horace, Odes, I, 16; Hyginus, De Astronomia, II, 15; Ovid ,Metamorphoses, I, 78-83; Juvenal, Satires, XIV, 35; IV, 133-4; Lucian, Works, I, 3 and 11-17
[48] In Fabulae, 155 and 183
[49] In Fragmenta,, by Philemon, translated by F. Dübner, Paris, Didot, not dated III
[50] In The Principal Fragments, 535 K, translated by F.F. Allinson, London, Heinemann, 1921

In this respect, Menander approves of Prometheus' suffering since, in his view, the creator of the woman is the one to blame for the gods' resentment.

Jacqueline Duchemin even put forward the theory that we could find the origin of Prometheus plasticator in Sumerio-Babylonians pantheons.[51] However, she also mentions that Prometheus' predecessor was not a god of fire. Though fascinating, and worth examining, this question[52] might lead us to wander from Prometheus' persona itself. The fortune of this aspect of Prometheus owes much to the Latin world, which was particularly inspired by it. For example, Hyginus' fable CXLII, entitled Pandora, tells us that mankind was formed by Prometheus from silt, before the creation of Hephaestus by Pandora, who was brought to life by Athena. The first woman married Epimetheus, and gave birth to a daughter called Pyrrha. In The Library (I, 7,1), Apollodorus gives an account of the creation of men, modelled by Prometheus with earth and water. Many early texts deal with the creative aspect of Prometheus, without bringing new elements to the constitution of the Titan's persona. The roles of the other gods change in these accounts, without modifying the shape of this myth. This is why we shall not linger on this aspect. However, we have to mention the most important text in the transmission of the image of Prometheus as a creator. Indeed, we know the tremendous influence Ovid's Metamorphoses had on countless generations of poets, and the myth of Prometheus plasticator was one of his legacies. His tale of Prometheus notably inspired, amongst others, Boccaccio and Goethe. The literary

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[51] In P. H. M. p. 20

[52] See the detail of this analysis in Prométhée, histoire du mythe de ses origines orientales à nos jours, by Jacqueline Duchemin, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2000, pp.20-21

quality of Ovid's poem, more than the novelty of the mythological material, appears as the reason for such an impact. The famous passage on Prometheus is the following:

Then man was made perhaps from seed divine

Formed by the great Creator, so to found

A better world, perhaps the new-made earth,

So lately parted from the ethereal heavens,

Kept still some essence of the kindred sky-

Earth that Prometheus moulded, mixed with water,

In likeness of the gods that govern the world-

And while the other creatures on all fours

Look downwards, man was made to hold his head

Erect in majesty and see the sky,

And raise his eyes to the bright stars above.

Thus earth, once crude and featureless, now changed

Put on the unknown form of humankind.[53]

The poetry of Ovid actually had a considerable effect upon the constitution of Prometheus' persona on an artistic level, even though the content of the myth itself did not know any major change. Finally, we must not forget to mention the influence of Lucian of Samosata on the evolution of the myth. Indeed, the writer treated the Prometheus myth several times in order to give shape to his thoughts. Lucian had already used the Prometheus myth in To a Man who had told Him: You are a Prometheus in Your Speeches, in which he presents the Titan as the creator of

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[53] In Metamorphoses, by Ovid, translated by A.D. Melville, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford, 1986, p.3

mankind, and employs him as the key element of rhetorical games. In actual fact, Lucian compares himself to Prometheus, making a parallel between the material the Titan's creatures are made of, clay, and the quality of his words, fragile and crumbly. He also draws a parallel with the titanic figure for the reason that the structure of his speech is based on a pre-existing model, again like Prometheus with men. In this respect, Lucian takes the various elements of the myth as paradigms, which he uses to give a root to his rhetorical construction. However, more importantly for the evolution of the myth, Prometheus or the Caucasus goes further than a demonstration of Lucian's virtuoso skills. In spite of the comic tone of this text, its consequence and contribution to the myth is the idea that gods are the creation of men. Indeed, in Prometheus or the Caucasus, Lucian put forward the idea that the world would be useless without men, since gods would not know their happiness if mankind were not unhappy. Equally true is the fact that, without men, gods would not be admired and idolised. This is how the writer comes to the conclusion that men simply make gods become so, which is a crucial step both in the constitution and interpretation of the Prometheus myth, even though we shall have to wait for the end of the eighteenth century and Goethe to see it become a fundamental element within the myth. Nonetheless, during the constitutive phase of the myth, the evolution of Prometheus as a persona was not only linked to the way in which his actions were treated by these various writers, but was also linked to his relationship with the other mythological characters surrounding him.

c. Prometheus' Auxiliaries

Athena and Hephaestus

Together with Prometheus, Athena and Hephaestus make up the trio of fire gods in Athens. It is not fortuitous that the three most famous lampadedromies (torchlight processions) were for those three gods : the Panathenaes, the Hephaesteias, and the Prometheia, all named after them. As a matter of fact, because of their association in the Academy, their roles in the Prometheus myth are sometimes interchangeable. We have already mentioned above[54] that in the primitive accounts of the Prometheus myth, the Titan was linked to the birth of Athena. However, this is not the only existing version of the birth of the goddess. Indeed, if in Ion, by Euripides,[55] Prometheus is the one to deliver Athena from Zeus by splitting his skull into two, according to Pindar,[56] Hephaestus, and not Prometheus, is responsible for this unusual birth. However, apart from the name of the improvised midwife in this mythological account, its content is identical. This element of the myth is also far from being the only link between Athena, Hephaestus and Prometheus.

In a certain way, Hephaestus seemed to be in competition with Prometheus. In actual fact, excepting their confusion in the account of Athena's birth, these two figures also shared the paternity of men for a while. Because both were gods of fire, which in Athens links them to the crafts of pottery and ceramics, both were soon to be associated into the creation of mankind. Indeed, in Greek mythology, since this type of creation seems invariably to be symbolically related to these two crafts, the

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[54] See *Supra*, p.16
[55] In Ion, by Euripides, 454 and following
[56] in Olympics, by Pindar, VII, 35

evolution of the two gods as plasticator was therefore not totally unexpected. However, as Marie Delcourt puts it,[57] whereas Hephaestus was originally a more powerful divinity in Greek cults, Prometheus, as a creative god, would have supplanted him. In the early accounts of the myth of Pandora, Prometheus is never clearly mentioned as her creator, as opposed to Hephaestus, who, since Hesiod's works, was traditionally regarded as Pandora's father. This attribution, as we know, was not to last. An undeniable kinship is at stake between Hephaestus and Prometheus, but we also have to bear in mind that, in spite of his great reluctance to comply, Hephaestus himself, in Æschylus' Prometheus Bound, is in charge of the binding of Prometheus. This element would in fact reveal the essential difference between the two gods of fire. Jacqueline Duchemin, reminding us of Georges Dumézil's works, emphasises the crucial importance of the distinction, in mythology, of "binding gods" (Zeus also being one of them) and "bound gods".[58] In this respect, it is difficult to ignore the fact that Hephaestus and Prometheus respectively appear as the perfect embodiments of these two categories. Indeed, we must not forget that Hephaestus, in Homer's Odyssey, makes Aphrodite and Ares prisoners, and that in Plato's Republic (II, 378 d), he binds his own mother, Hera. This characteristic scission amongst greek gods would therefore have limited the confusion between Hephaestus and Prometheus, and avoided their assimilation.

Concerning Athena, we are here going to leave aside her relationship to Hephaestus (so close that in certain accounts, she was referred to as his wife), to concentrate on

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[57] In Hephaistos ou la Légende du Magicien, by Marie Delcourt, Université de Liège- Belles Lettres, Paris, 1957, pp.156-157

[58] In P. H. M., p.55

her link to Prometheus. At that stage of the history of the Prometheus myth, the symbolic importance Athena will have in the evolution of the Prometheus myth is only being set up, but all the elements of their future association are already beginning to take root. Athena, in the Prometheus myth, is not as important for what she represents as a goddess compared with what she symbolises, on a higher level. Indeed, Athena is the offspring of Zeus and Mêtis, but an unusual offspring, since Zeus devoured the goddess. This is anything but fortuitous, since Mêtis symbolises divine intelligence. The unexpected way Zeus gives birth to Athena is therefore as meaningful as Zeus' "union" to Mêtis: she appears as the resurgence of the embodiment of divine intelligence. It explains why, in many accounts of the creation of Pandora, she is the one to breathe life into her, that is, to awake her conscience and to actually give birth to her. This element, as we shall see, will be at the origin of the close association of Athena and Prometheus in later versions of the myth. However, it is now time to examine a character who, associated with Prometheus, constitutes one of the most famous mythological duos.

Pandora

Pandora, in Greek, means "the present of all" ("Pantes" means "all, and "doron", "gift") , but appears as a very paradoxical gift to men. At the beginning of the history of the Prometheus myth, she is almost always presented as part of a trio including the Titan and Epimetheus, and as such embodies the triumph of Zeus over Prometheus. Indeed, the binding of Prometheus is not the only punishment for his crime, since his chastisement is not only directed towards the Titan himself. In Hesiod's Works and Days, the creation of Pandora by the Olympian gods aims first to upset Prometheus'

plans for men, and second to make their destiny miserable (line 56 and following). Many of the Olympian gods take part in the creation of Pandora: Hephaestus models the clay to give her shape, she inherits her grace from Aphrodite, and Athena teaches her crafts before adorning her and girding her loins. But the gift of gods is meant to be the curse of men. From line 591 to line 612, Hesiod develops a long diatribe against women, this "accursed crew". Pandora is ambivalent on more than one level: both a curse and a gift, she is the "present of all" being both the present of gods, since she was their creation, and the present of men, since they are the consignees of the present. In the Theogony, Pandora's character, nameless in Works and Days, is much more developed than in Hesiod's previous work. She receives an extra "gift" from a god, Hermes, who transmits deceitfulness to her, together with the art of lying. Adorned in that fashion, she is led to Epimetheus, who, in spite of his brother's warning, cannot fight against his fascination with Pandora. As soon as she arrives on Earth, men are plunged into misery, since she opens the jar[59] containing all the ills of the world. Only Hope remains under the lid. Hesiod's conclusion, after the account of the Pandora episode, makes clear the fact that she is the actual punishment for Prometheus' crime towards Zeus: "There is no way to escape Zeus' schemes". Prometheus tried to help men, and they are punished for that. In Hesiod's text, how and where Pandora found the jar is not revealed, but researchers[60] agree that the jar was probably in the possession of Epimetheus, who, in a few early accounts of the

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[59] And not the box

[60] See Pandora, l'Eve grecque, by Louis Séchan, Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé, XXIII, Paris, 1929, p.12 ; Le Festin d'immortalité, by Georges Dumézil, Paris, 1924, p.98

Prometheus myth, even opens the jar himself.[61] In this regard, it is interesting to see that Pandora, at that stage of the Prometheus myth, is almost always represented as being part of a trio, with Prometheus and Epimetheus.

If we take into account Karl Kérényi's interpretation of the relationship between the two brothers, already mentioned above, Pandora's role is even more interesting.[62] If Prometheus and Epimetheus, in the early accounts of the Prometheus myth, are but the two opposite poles of a Primordial being, it could explain why Epimetheus is irremediably attracted to her, whereas Prometheus desperately warns his brother against her. Their antagonistic feelings of attraction-repulsion would therefore be the reflection of the bipolarity of this unique being as perceived by Karl Kérényi. Indeed, when Epimetheus begins to disappear from the treatments of the Prometheus myth, this duality of feelings for Pandora will be carried by Prometheus alone, and will become a form of ambivalence, as we shall see in the next chapter when studying Goethe's incomplete play entitled Prometheus.[63] Another interpretation of Pandora's value as a character is that of Raymond Trousson,[64] who works from Guarducci's theories. According to him, the myth of Pandora, as an original myth, is a food myth whose equivalent we can find in every civilisation. In actual fact, "a quarrel between demons and gods around a foodstuff providing immortality is usually at the basis of original myths. The Gods, who succeed in winning this good, are stolen by the demons. Thus, a god dressed up like a woman or a goddess comes to the enemy, and,

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[61] See Fable 58 , by Babrios, and De Pietate, by Philodemus.
[62] See *Supra*, p.15, Note 23.
[63] In Early Verse Drama and Prose Plays, by Johann Wolfang Von Goethe. Edited by Cyrus Hamlin and Frank Ryder, translated by Robert M. Browning, Michael Hamburger, Cyrus Hamlin, and Frank Ryder. Surhamp Publishers, New York, 1988
[64] In Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne, by Raymond Trousson, Droz, Genève, 1964, p.31

by guile, manages to take the object of contention back. Then a war starts between the two groups, in which the demons are eventually defeated. From this legendary complex, the feature referring to Pandora is the expedition of the transvestite god, or the goddess, amongst the enemies."[65] In this respect, the strong link between the Prometheus myth and that of Pandora would be reinforced by the fact that both of them were fundamental myths, that of Prometheus notably being to a certain extent a creation myth, and that of Pandora, a food, and therefore original myth. This could explain why, as we shall see later, the fortune of the myth of Pandora was also bound to be tremendous. We have thus briefly cast light on how the Prometheus myth and its corollary were constituted during Antiquity, but we now must consider what happened to the pagan myth at the dawn of Christianity.

2. *From Antiquity to Christianity*

a. A Christianised Prometheus or the Legend within the Myth

Countless nineteenth century as well as twentieth century commentators on the Prometheus myth wrote about the clear parallel established between Jesus Christ and the Titan by the Fathers of the Church. A parallel of such a nature was not striking for their time, since many contemporary works of art were based on it. However, finding grounds to assert its accuracy at the beginning of Christianity is a much more complex task, in spite of the assertiveness and confidence of generations of commentators. Indeed, the still widespread belief that Prometheus, according to the Fathers of the

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[65] *Ibid.*

Church, was a prefiguration of Jesus Christ, relies on a dubious interpretation and agglomeration of works by Tertullian.

To give one of the most conspicuous examples of this fact, one of the most notorious nineteenth century intellectual figures in France, Edgar Quinet, in the preface of his Prométhée[66](1838), quoted two expressions by Tertullian in order to justify the idea that his conception of Prometheus was shared by the Greek and Latin apologists. The passages in question were "Hic est verus Prometheus, Deus omnipotens blasphemiis lancinatus", and "crucibus Caucasorum", two expressions which do not exist as such in Tertullian's texts.

In actual fact, in his Apologetic[67] (XVIII, 2), after mentioning great pagan men who had deserved to have presentiments about the Christian God, he states, "Hic est enim verus Prometheus, qui saeculum certis temporabus dispositionibus et exitibus ordinavit".[68] In this occurrence, it appears that instead of establishing a parallel between Jesus Christ and Prometheus, Tertullian put forward the idea that Prometheus, compared to God, is in fact an impostor. The other passage in which Tertullian mentions the Titan is in Adversus Marcionem[69] (I, I, 3), when Tertullian describes his enemy Marcion's hostile country, Pontus. The quotation is rather long, but it is preferable, for more clarity about the context, not to shorten it: "nihil illic nisi feritas calet illa scilicet quae fabulas scenis dedit, de sacrifiis Taurorum et amoribus Colchorum, et crucibus Caucasorum. Sed nihil tam barbarum ac triste apud Pontum quem quod illic Marcion natus est, Scytha tetrior, Hamaxobio instabilior, Massageta

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[66] Prométhée, by Edgar Quinet, Paris, 1838
[67] Apologetic and practical treatises, by Tertullian, vol. 1, translated by C. Dodgson, John Henry Parker, Oxford, Rivington, London, 1842
[68] "For He is the true Prometheus who gave order to the world by arranging the seasons and their course".
[69] In Ante-Nicene Christian Library, volume VII, translated by Peter Holmes, T&T Clark, 1868

inhumanior, Amazone audacior, nubilo obscurior, hieme frigidior, gelu fragilior, Istro fallacior, Caucaso abruptior. Quidni? Penes quem verus Prometheus Deus omnipotens blasphemies lancinatur".[70] Thus, in Adversus Marcionem, Tertullian, again, rejects any type of parallel between Prometheus and Jesus Christ, and presents Prometheus as some kind of impostor compared to God, "the true Prometheus". The claimed quality of Prometheus to which Tertullian refers, in this perspective, cannot possibly be his rebellious side, but might be his creative power, or, more plausibly, because Tertullian uses Prometheus' name as a category, the quality contained in its etymology: "the forethinker". In any case, what was presented as an undeniable evidence of the existence of a "Prometheus Christus" at the beginning of Christianity, when analysed in its context, tends to prove the contrary.

What is more surprising is that Edgar Quinet was not alone in making this mistake. Trousson, with regard to this intriguing phenomenon, attempted to make a census of the various critics who sustained or contributed to spread such a false statement about the interpretation of Prometheus at the beginning of Christianity. For a very detailed record it is worth referring to his work.[71] However, we shall limit ourselves to a few examples restricted to the nineteenth-century and Symbolist period in order to show how such a misinterpretation could continue to develop in modern criticism. Trousson put forward the idea that, because of his great influence, Quinet was the initiator of

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[70] "Nothing there has the glow of life, but that ferocity which has given to scenic plays their stories of the sacrifices of the Taurians, and the love of the Colchians, and the torments of the Caucasus. Nothing, however, in Pontus is so barbarous and sad as the fact that Marcion was born there, fouler than any Scythian, more roving than the waggon-life of the Samartian, more inhuman than the Massagete, more audacious than an Amazon, darker than the cloud, colder than its winter, more brittle than its ice, more deceitful than the Ister, more craggy than Caucasus. Nay more, the true Prometheus, Almighty God, is mangled by Marcion's blasphemies.", *Ibid.*, p.2

[71] In T.P.L.E., pp. 110-113

the propagation of this interpretation of the Prometheus myth. As well as quoting the authority of Tertullian, he wrote that "a commentator of Æschylus, the Englishman Stanley, noticed that the Fathers of Christianity took it upon themselves to interpret in that way the Prometheus figure, a long time before I did. [...] They often compared the torture of the Caucasus with the Calvary Passion, thus making Prometheus a Christ before Christ. Among these authorities, that of Tertullian is especially striking".[72] What appears as even more "striking" is that, if Thomas Stanley duly compared the intensity of the suffering of Jesus Christ and the Titan, the only authority that he quoted for this was that of Tertullian. Henceforth, because of the unchallenged authority of all the Fathers of the Church (even though only the distorted passage from Tertullian could be quoted), together with those of Thomas Stanley and Edgar Quinet, commentators took for granted that, since the origins of Christianity, Prometheus and Jesus Christ had been associated. Thus, A. Nicolas advanced that "the double persona of the Messiah, both triumphant and victim, can be found in the drama Prometheus Bound, which could be called Waiting for the liberator".[73] During the second half of the nineteenth century, references to the Fathers of the Church were carried on, getting bolder and bolder. In 1913, F. Polderman put forward the idea that the link established between the tortures of the Caucasus and the Calvary was no more than "a poetical commonplace since Tertullian"![74] Those examples, taken from amongst many others which seemed to multiply until the publication of Trousson's work in 1964, reveal the awesome phenomenon of criticism feeding upon itself.

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[72] Quoted by Raymond Trousson in T.P.L.E., p.110. My translation.
[73] *Ibid.*, p.111. My translation.
[74] *Ibid.*, p.112. My translation

However, if there was indeed no ground for finding an identification between Prometheus and Jesus Christ in the Patristic literature, and however astonishing the legend around Tertullian's distorted quotation might be, we cannot entirely reject the value of the commentaries which arose from it.[75] Indeed, we must never neglect the aspect of reception, and, as we shall be led to examine in a further chapter, this legend had a strong impact on nineteenth-century artists. We could even go so far as to say that, even if the association between Jesus Christ and Prometheus had not been made by critics by mistake, it would have influenced Romanticism, and, consequently, Symbolism, being in the "air du temps". Nevertheless, having examined what was thought of the status of Prometheus at the beginning of Christianity, we now have to study what was really made of the Titan at that time.

b. Prometheus, Euhemerism and Pagan Presentiments

At the very beginning of the Christian era, there was no evolution of the Prometheus myth, as the early Fathers of the Church did not attempt to link the myth to the Bible. As noted in the previous paragraph, Tertullian did not throw bridges between Prometheus and Jesus Christ, and it is understandable that no early Father would have attempted to do so. Indeed, at a time when Christianity was barely established, was still comparatively fragile as a religion, such a parallel would have had threatening implications. The dangers involved in suggesting that that Prometheus was a fore-runner of Jesus Christ were considerable, since the implication of such a parallel

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[75] Cf. T.P.L.E., pp.98-99, n.24, and P.H.M., pp.110-111, where Trousson and Duchemin present as absurdities the attempts to establish links between the tortures of Prometheus and Jesus Christ. However "superficial" and "tasteless" (P.H.M., p.111) they might be, their development in the nineteenth century has an importance from a historical point of view.

would have been the association of Zeus with the Christian God. However, Prometheus truly revolted against Zeus, whereas a revolt of Jesus Christ against His Father was absolutely unconceivable. Moreover, Zeus, whimsical and fallible, had little in common with the Christian God, had a parallel been pushed further. Trousson rhetorically wonders whether it would have been possible to make of Prometheus "a precursor of Jesus Christ, a sort of prophet revolting against pagan beliefs, Fire coming to symbolise the true faith",[76] a question which he immediately answers negatively: "paganism was still very near, and we would have risked a return to idolatry".[77] Indeed, Prometheus was quite a powerful figure within paganism, and using him to strengthen the new religion, on the contrary, would probably have weakened it. Myths were still structuring people's lives, and still represented a way of thinking, a system of values and cultural references.

The Christian apologists therefore attempted to highlight the absurd, and even ridiculous, aspects of myths, and tried to show that they were nothing but distorted stories or historical facts. In order to do so, those apologists judged the myth through Christian criteria, the most important of them being the notion of History. Jesus was a historical character, which gave him a tangible aspect, as opposed to mythical characters, who were presented as nothing more than fabulous creations, and implausibilities. The first Christians, to weaken the influence of myths on other people, did not recognise myths and the new religion as two different systems, but exposed the irrelevance of the myths from a historical point of view. They invoked a way of thinking which was completely antithetical to the notion of myth. Indeed, as

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[76] In T.P.L.E., p.99
[77] *Ibid.*

Mircea Eliade put it, "we must never forget that one of the essential functions of the myth is in its provision of an opening into the Great Time, a periodic new-entry into Time primordial. This is shown by a tendency to a neglect of the present time, of what is called the 'historic moment' ".[78]

The first Fathers of the Church therefore adopted the theory of Euhemerism[79] in order to counteract the tendency people had to return to myths, if not under the form of an adoration of the idols, at least as a way of thinking. Thus, they tried to rationalise the fantastic aspect of the Greek myths in order to show that if they had remote origins, they were nonetheless products of embellishment and human imagination. As Trousson put it, "Generally, exegetes tackled [the Prometheus myth] with [...] care, in order not to arouse contradiction and controversy. Christians themselves had to be shown the foundation of pagan beliefs and that the lack of religious value of these myths should be demonstrated to them. They were not to ignore Prometheus, but to bring him back to human dimensions, to present the myth as a banal historical fact, distorted by credulousness and superstition, sublimated by poetical imagination".[80] In such an euhemerist perspective, one of the common "human identities" that was lent to Prometheus was that of an Egyptian sage, who lived at the same time as Moses. For an exhaustive analysis of the sources of this euhemerist interpretation of the Prometheus myth, one can refer again to Trousson.[81] Another interesting explanation of the "identity" of Prometheus is the theory that he was in fact the inventor of

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[78] In Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, by Mircea Eliade, translated by Philip Mairet, Collins Fontana Library, 1968, p.34

[79] The word Euhemerism derives from the name of Euhemerus, a Greek philosopher from about 300 AD, who believed that mythological gods were in fact deified mortals, whose acts had been amplified.

[80] In T.P.L.E., p.101

[81] *Ibid.*, p.102, and note 30 on the same page.

statuary, a theory first put forward by Lactantius and redeveloped by Isodorus of Sevilla three centuries later.[82] Therefore, one can see that the various mythological characteristics of the Titan, as the forethinker who rebels against the Olympian order as well as the creator of mankind, were accounted for by the Fathers of the Church. As Trousson notes, commenting on Lactantius and Isodorus of Sevilla's shared interpretation of Prometheus, it "[developed] a soothing doctrine which allowed [the Fathers] to clear up the potential doubts of lukewarm Christians concerning the excellence of their religion, and even [seduced] backward looking pagans by demonstrating the absurdity of their beliefs".[83]

Such explanations of the Prometheus myth coexisted along with theories of Pagan presentiments, which, in a different way, allowed the myth to be funnelled into new ways of thinking. Indeed, before the fifth century, the power of myths – and particularly of influential ones such as the Prometheus myth – was still very strong, and another way of dealing with them was to recognise that there was some truth in the narratives which the Greeks constructed, but only because they were a partial revelation of the truth. This was aimed at enabling the Pagans to discover, in due time, the real religion. One of the most troubling aspects of the Prometheus myth, and one which conflicted with the theory of God's Creation, was the representation of Prometheus as the creator of mankind. Thus, the theory that this element of the myth was in fact a confused, distorted and fragmentary revelation of the Creation was put forward.[84] From the dawn of Christianity to the fifth century, because of the double

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[82] Cf T.P.L.E., pp.104-105
[83] *Ibid.*, p.105
[84] This was notably the theory put forward by Clement of Alexandria. Cf. T.P.L.E., p.105

concern with showing people the implausibilities of myths as well as converting those who were still incredulous, the Prometheus myth was tackled with great cautiousness. The result of this attitude was that, if the Prometheus myth was not ignored by the Fathers of the Church, the interpretations of the myth did not evolve as such. Moreover, as noted earlier, there were no associations between the Titan and biblical characters.

From the fifth century AD, Christianity had nothing to fear from myths and Pagan beliefs, and, from that point, a redevelopment of the Prometheus myth could have been witnessed. However, during the Middle Ages, Prometheus was one of the great absentees of literature, given that mythology was then rediscovered, and fed the inspiration of many writers expressing themselves in vernacular languages.[85] Pandora, on the other hand, was largely elaborated upon as a myth, possibly because in an euhemerist perspective, she was inevitably linked to Eve, who was also a "negative" character. Given that Prometheus was largely ignored until the Renaissance, we now have to consider what was made of the mythological character at that time, notably in the pictorial field.

3. *Prometheus during the Renaissance and Beyond*

a. The Revaluation of Prometheus

In spite of the general ignorance of Prometheus during the Middle Ages, one account of the myth, dating from the fourteenth century, undoubtedly influenced and gave

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[85] From the twelfth century, when novels in common languages appeared, myths were "rediscovered" as a profuse and endless creative material, as Paul Renucci explains in L'aventure de l'humanisme européen au Moyen Age (XIVème-Xvème siècle), Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1953.

shape to the interpretation of the Prometheus myth during the Renaissance. This comes as a surprising piece of information, but less so considering that its author was the humanist Giovanni Boccaccio. In actual fact, in the middle of the fourteenth century, Boccaccio was commissioned by the King of Cyprus, Hugo, to compile an encyclopaedic work assembling classical myths and various legends. This resulted in Boccaccio's De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium, in which an entire chapter, entitled *De Prometheo Japeti Filio, qui fecit Pandoram et genuit Ysidem et Deucalionem*[86] is devoted to the Titan. It is acknowledged that scholars from the Renaissance, although having a remarkable knowledge, had often gained this latter from compilations such as that of Boccaccio, and not from the immediate, first hand literary source. This is an important element in understanding why the Genealogy was so influential. A second explanatory element lies in the originality of Boccaccio's thoughts on the Prometheus myth. Boccaccio's methodology in his Genealogy followed that of the traditional medieval hermeneutics, divided into literal, allegorical, moral, and analogical interpretations. For the first analysis, he relied on Ovid's account of the myth, presenting Prometheus as the creator of mankind, as well as on a "secondary" account by Fulgentius,[87] in which Minerva takes Prometheus to the sky, where he steals a spark from Apollo's cart. If Boccaccio first presents the Prometheus myth as an attempt to explain divine creation, the interpretation he makes of Prometheus himself is far more original, since he puts forward the idea that there are in fact two Prometheus. The first one is Ovid's character, that is to say Prometheus plasticator, or

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[86] In Genealogia deorum gentilium libri, by Giovanni Boccaccio, edited by V. Romano Bari, Laterza, 1951, book IV, Chapter XLIV.
[87] In Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii V.C. Opera, by Fulgentius, edited by Rudolf Helm, Leipzig, 1898, Stuttgart, 1970

the pagan distorted image of the Creator, God Almighty. The second Prometheus is presented by Boccaccio as a wise man, an ascetic who retreated to the Caucasus for years before teaching sciences and the art of living within society to his fellow men. Boccaccio's analysis, even though euhemeristic in nature, is fascinating in the sense that his "Prometheus duplex" is linked to a "homo duplex". Indeed, Boccaccio advances that the first being made by Prometheus (in fact God almighty) was perfect, and did not need to be taught anything. However, this same man, following the original sin, became debased, justifying the intervention of the second Prometheus, who brought civilisation, and dragged men out of their natural state. We can see how this interpretation of the Prometheus myth resolutely appears as humanistic, inasmuch as it emphasises man's perfectibility, and the possibility of a fulfilment in spite of, or over and above, the original sin. As Trousson phrases it, "[man's] individuality eventually asserts itself and his ability to create is compared, even though deferentially, to that of the Almighty".[88] Boccaccio's humanistic interpretation of the Prometheus myth truly paved the way for a revaluation of Prometheus at the Renaissance, when Humanism blossomed. It is also important to notice that according to Boccaccio, the notion of Prometheus' guilt disappeared, since it is willingly that he retreats to the Caucasus. Therefore, as Trousson notes, Boccaccio analyses "the eagle [...] [as] the symbol of the 'high considerations' which torment the solitary searcher".[89]

Amongst the great humanist thinkers who were directly influenced by Boccaccio were the eminent Marsilius Ficinus and Picco della Mirandola, who developed similar

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[88] In T.P.L.E., p. 131
[89] *Ibid.*, p.132

interpretations of the myth,[90] even though they differed in their conclusions. Indeed, both men, in the same line as Boccaccio, saw Prometheus as the benefactor of mankind, in the sense that he endowed them with the various techniques and knowledge which allowed them to survive and to found civilisation. According to Ficinus, Prometheus represented a superior spiritual power, as opposed to Epimetheus, who embodied instincts and the natural state, on the side of bestiality. In this respect, Ficinus presents in a different way the duality of man already highlighted by Boccaccio.

However, Masilius Ficinus, as well as Picco della Mirandola, developed an interesting aspect of the Prometheus myth. In actual fact, they put forward the idea that thanks to Prometheus, man, with his spiritual and natural sides, became "a go-between between Earth and Heaven, between contemplation and action".[91] The knowledge that man received from Prometheus allowed them, to quote Ficinus famous sentence, to become God on Earth: "est utique Deus in Terris".[92] It is at that point that the views of Picco della Mirandola and Ficinus vary. According to Picco della Mirandola, man can glorify himself for the nobleness of his position, and for his striving towards the spiritual world, whereas, according to Marsilius Ficinus, that very same position is tragic, since man is ineluctably bound to his material existence. In other terms, man is condemned to contemplate the spiritual world without being able to reach it. What comes as particularly interesting in the interpretation of Ficinus and Picco della

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[90] In Marsilii Ficini, philosophi Platonici, medici atque theology, omnium praestantissimi, opera..., Basilae, by Marsilius Ficinus, 1561; De Hominis dignitate Heptaplus de ente et uno, e scritti vari, by Picco della Mirandola, edited by Eugenio Garin, volume I, Edizione Nazionale dei Classici del Pensiero Italiano, Florence, 1942.

[91] In Sous le signe de la révolution, by Jacques Réattu, Musée de la Révolution Française, Actes Sud, Paris, 2000, p.44

[92] In Theologica Platonica, by Marsilius Ficinus, XVI, 6, volume I, p.378

Mirandola, fed by Boccaccio, is that for the first time since Æschylus, the value of Prometheus' sacrifice was questioned. Even with Æschylus, the focus of the myth was on the value of Prometheus' act regarding Zeus and his power. When mankind was mentioned, it was to point out their indifference or their ungratefulness. But for the first time in the history of the Prometheus myth, his relationship with mankind is examined. Prometheus is no more considered in a unilateral manner, as a trickster, a rebel, or a creator, and the focus of the myth shifts beyond the evaluation of his rebellion, onto the beneficiary of his sacrifice, man. The other great humanists gave the same orientation to the Prometheus myth: for Pomponazzi[93] and Erasmus,[94] Prometheus brings a nobleness to the terrestrial life, where the quest of knowledge gives a meaning to human life, whereas for Francis Bacon[95], the theft of fire represents the application of knowledge to tangible technical knowledge aiming at the improvement of the human condition. In parallel with this interpretation of the myth emerged one which would later have a tremendous influence on artists, notably in the nineteenth century. In order to examine it, we have to go back to Boccaccio's time and look into the work of another precursor, Filippo Villani.

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[93] In Libri quinque de fato, de libero arbitrio et de pradestinatione, by Pietro Pomponazzi, edited by R. Lemay, Lucani, in aedibus Thesauri Mundi, 1957

[94] In Adagia, id est: Proverbiorum, paroemiarum et parabolarum omnium, quae apud Graecos, Latinos, Hebraeos, Arabos, etc. in usu fuerunt, by Desiderius Erasmus, Typis Wechelianis, Sumptibus Joannis Pressii, 1643.

[95] In The Works, by Francis Bacon, De Sapientia Veterum Liber, edited by J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D.D. Heath, London, 1889-1892

b. The Birth of the Titan as an Artist.

In the fourteenth century, the Florentine Filippo Villani wrote Le vite d'uomini illustri fiorentini[96] (which translates as The Lives of Famous Florentine Men), a study of individuals among which ranked two of the most notorious artists of the time, Cimabue, and his pupil Giotto. In one of his chapters, "Di Giotto et altri dipintori fiorentini"[97], Villani actually praises artists, such as Cimabue and Giotto, who had understood and applied the aesthetic principle of mimesis to their work, the idea that art has to imitate Nature, and that the artistic creation has to follow the model given by Creation itself. It is in this context that Villani conjures up the figure of Prometheus, by putting forward the idea that during Antiquity, it was thought that "Prometeo pe' suoi ingegni e diligenza, aveva del limo della terra creato un uomo".[98] Therefore, according to Villani, the Prometheus myth would be an illustration of the power of the artist, who, through his creative power, rivals God, or, on another scale (the humanist concept of microcosm), is the god of his own realm. The idea put forward by Villani was not a new one, but the way in which he tackled the Prometheus myth represented a big step in its interpretation. Indeed, as Trousson notes about Villani's interpretation, "it is not the banal application of the procedures of euhemerism any more, but the use of a symbol",[99] a symbol which would inspire many artists, especially in the nineteenth century.

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[96] Le vite d'uomini illustri fiorentini, by Filippo Villani, annotated by Count Giammaria Mazzuchelli, Academico della Crusca, Pasquali, Venice, 1747

[97] Which translates "On Giotto and other Florentine painters", *Ibid.*, pp.80-82

[98] "Prometheus, thanks to his talents and diligence, had created a man from the silt of the earth". My translation. Quoted by Trousson in T.P.L.E., p.144

[99] *Ibid.*, p.144

However, despite the revival of an interest for the Prometheus figure among humanists, especially during the Renaissance, few works were painted on the subject. However, a famous diptych by Piero di Cosimo, renowned for being mysterious, echoed and perfectly illustrated Villani's interpretation of the myth. The diptych in question is entitled Storie de Prometeo [100](The Myth of Prometheus), dated 1515-1520. The first panel (fig.1a) is in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, and the second (fig.1b) in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg.

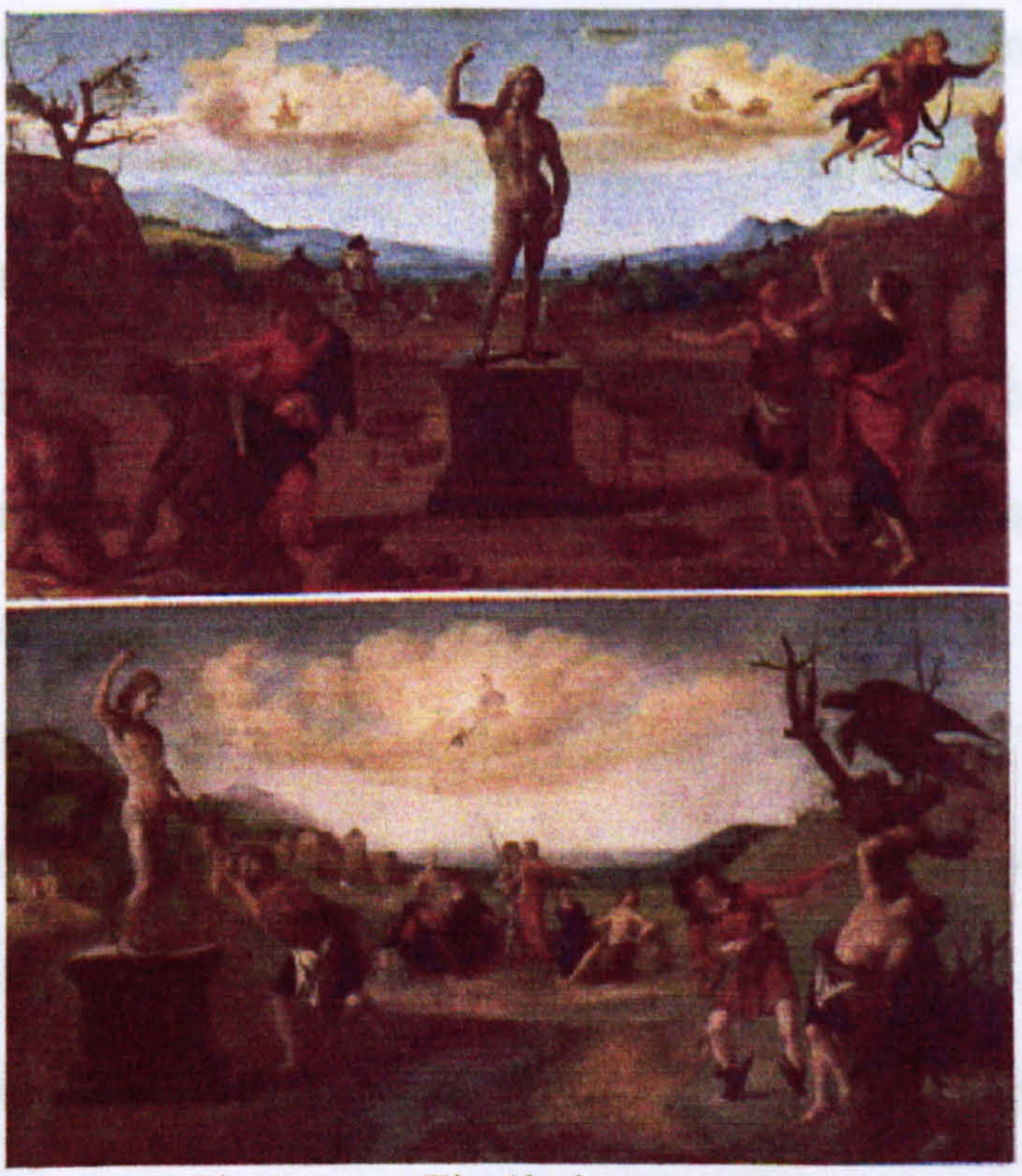

Fig.1a, top; Fig.1b, bottom

In his two paintings, the focus Piero adopted on Prometheus centres on Prometheus Plasticator and the creation of men. However, Prometheus is not represented endowed with his Titanic dimensions, but as a somehow rural craftsman with an apron, a

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[100] Storie de Prometeo, (1515-1520) by Piero di Cosimo, oil on panel, Alte Pinakothek Munich, and oil on panel, Musée de Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg.

physique in total contrast with the beauty of Prometheus' statue, a version of Michelangelo's David. In this respect, the mythical attributes of Prometheus are faded out to emphasise the figure of an artist who appears as human, and very possibly as a *mise en abyme* of the artist. The way in which the other elements of the myth are treated would confirm this hypothesis. Indeed, the fact that some of the characters are depicted in courtesans' outfits is certainly not fortuitous. Let us first analyse briefly the composition of the two paintings in order to bring out what elements of the myth Piero chose to highlight.

In the Munich panel, the left part of the painting is devoted to Epimetheus, Piero probably following here Boccaccio's Genealogy, in which he mentions that Epimetheus, and not Prometheus, first attempted to mould man. In the top left corner of the painting, he is depicted as a monkey, always following Boccaccio's account, which mentions that such was Jupiter's punishment of Epimetheus for his initiative. The rest of the painting is devoted to Prometheus and his sculpture. A semi-circle starting from the bottom right corner of the painting and finishing in the second quarter of the painting, in the top left of the composition, depicts Minerva taking Prometheus to the sky so that he can steal a spark from Apollo's cart. In the second panel, we can see Prometheus on the left, bringing his sculpture to life thanks to the fire he stole from the Olympian gods, as shown in the top middle of the painting. In the opposite corner, Prometheus is being bound to a tree by Mercury, who is dressed as a courtesan, while the eagle is waiting to start his labour. In the middle, the figure of Epimetheus is represented again, showing the scene where he accepts the poisoned present of the Olympian gods, Pandora. In this respect, as Daniel Arasse notes, what is

presented as a divine favour (Minerva's offer to Prometheus to bring back anything he desires from Heaven, and Zeus' gift to Epimetheus, Pandora) to the two brothers is in both cases a poisoned present.[101] Given that, in his diptych, Piero used Prometheus as a symbol for the artist, along the same line as Villani, and given that he chose to represent Prometheus' torturer, Mercury, as a courtesan, we could interpret his paintings as a representation of the dependence of artists on patrons. This could be confirmed by the only account we have of Piero's life, by Vasari,[102] who presented the painter as a wild and eccentric man who preferred Nature and animals to the society of men. Piero di Cosimo's original interpretation of the Prometheus myth fully exploits the symbolic use of the Titan inaugurated by Vasari, through a *mise en abyme* of the artist figure. However, such an interpretation remained isolated in the pictorial world of the time, maybe to the image of Piero himself. Another common treatment of the Prometheus myth which emerged during the Renaissance was to use his main attribute, fire, as a metaphor to represent the suffering of passionate love, as found in the work of Ronsard, for example. However, we shall not develop this particular interpretation of the myth, as it was using the flame of Prometheus as an allegory, that is in a fixed way, opposed to the protean aspect of Prometheus we are interested in. Furthermore, this allegory was not widely spread during the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, which is where this introductory chapter is leading. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider, however briefly, the other pictorial interpretations made of the Prometheus myth during the Renaissance, as one of them

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[101] In Le Sujet dans le tableau, by Daniel Arasse, Idées et Recherches, Flammarion, Paris, 1997, p.56
[102] In The Lives of the Artists, by Giorgio Vasari, translated by Julia and Peter Bondanella, Oxford World's Classics, Cary, North Carolina, 1998

in particular was to determine the representation of Prometheus for more than a century.

c. Origins of the "Traditional" Representation of Prometheus

In 1548 and 1549, Titian painted a series of four paintings for Philip II, a series entitled "The Four Condemned", and which depicted Ixion, Tantalus, Sisyphus, and Tityus. Of the four paintings, only two remain to this day: Sisyphus[103] and Tityus[104](fig.2),

Fig.2

[103] Sisyphus, by Titian (1548-1549), oil on canvas, 2.37 × 2.16 m, Prado Museum, Madrid.
[104] Tityus, by Titian (1548-1549), oil on canvas, 2.53 × 2.17 m, Prado Museum, Madrid.

which was traditionally thought to be a representation of Prometheus, and which became a great source of inspiration for subsequent painters. Tityus, indeed, suffered the same punishment as Prometheus, since he was condemned to have his vitals preyed upon by a vulture to the end of time, chained to sharp rocks. However, unlike Prometheus, such a punishment did not result from his love for mankind, but from having violated Latona.[105] Titian's depiction of Tityus is particularly striking in the sense that the painter, by focusing on the plasticity and muscularity of Tityus' naked body, emphasised the tension and unbearable suffering of his endless martyrdom. As Harold E. Wethey put it, "it is indeed unexpected and astonishing that Titian, renowned for the seductive beauty of his feminine nudes and the gay abandon of his bacchanalian figures, should render so successfully the horror of eternal torture".[106]

The way in which Titian chose to depict Tityus might not be a stranger to the fact that he started working on "The Four Condemned" not long after his return from a trip to Rome, where he had time to examine the work of Michelangelo,[107] and surely, to appreciate the muscular beauty of his male bodies. The confusion established around the identity of the martyr in Titian's painting might come from the fact that it is said in the Odyssey that Tityus was tormented by two vultures, whereas Titian only

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[105] Odyssey, XI, 779-794. The other literary sources of Tityus' story are the Aeneid, by Virgil, VI, 595-600, and the Metamorphoses, by Ovid, IV, 457-458

[106] In The Paintings of Titian, by Harold E. Wethey, vol. III, The Mythological and Historical Paintings, Phaidon, University Press, Aberdeen, 1975, p.61

[107] However, it is not known whether Titian had any knowledge of Michelangelo's own drawing of Tityus, which is very different in conception, and which is now part of the Queen's collection at Windsor Castle (Popham and Wilde, 1949, cat. N°429). It is also important to notice here that Paul de Saint-Victor, in Les deux masques, mentioned that Michelangelo, while sketching his first general designs for the Sistine Chapel, had made two drawings of Prometheus, the first one depicting him under the torture of the eagle on the threshold of a collapsing pagan temple, whereas in the second one, he is vertically crucified on a big oak (the tree of knowledge?). Unfortunately, those two drawings, which could have been very important in the analysis of Prometheus in relation to Christianity, are now lost. Cf P.H.M., by Duchemin, pp.117-118, and M.P., by Louis Séchan, Chapter I note 100.

depicted one sumptuous black eagle gnawing at Tityus' liver. Calvete de Estrella, the official chronicler of Philip II, who described "The Four Condemned" at Binche in 1549, already thought that Tityus was in fact Prometheus, and for centuries it was very often identified as such.[108] The composition of Tityus, which represents him lying on the rocks, wriggling with pain, with his head tilted back, deeply influenced the later pictorial representations of Prometheus. Rubens' Prometheus Bound (1611-1612, fig.3),[109] which is usually presented as the most famous painting of the Titan, clearly shows the influence of Titian.

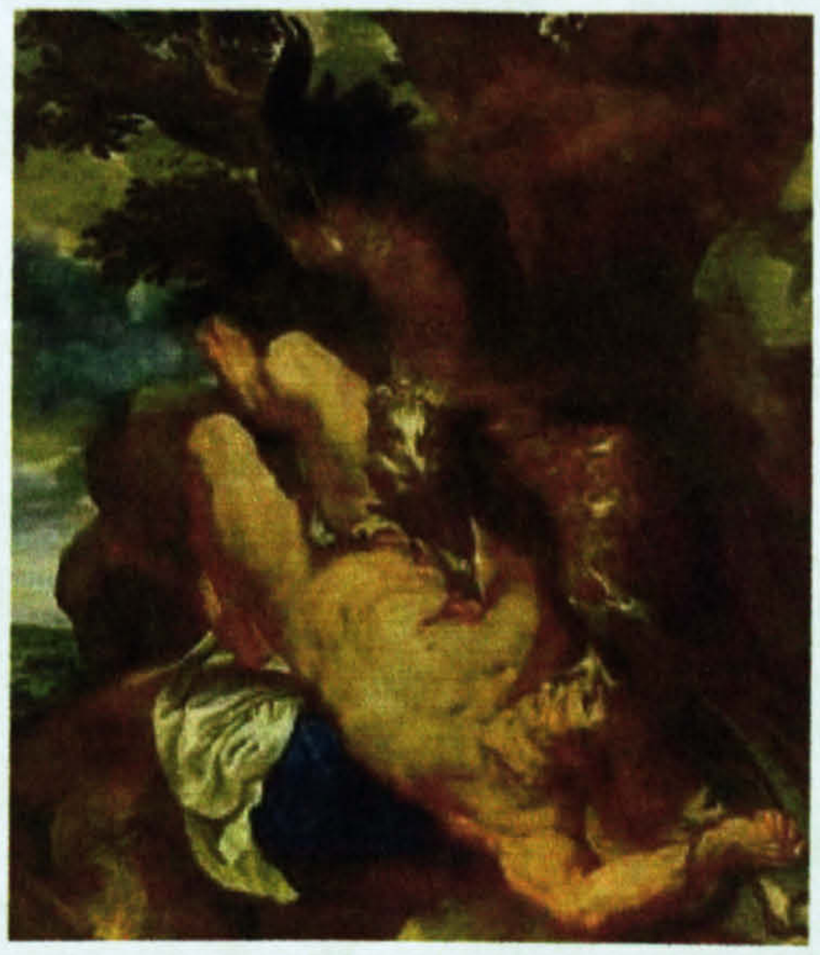

Fig.3

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[108] In 1566, the poet Mal-Lara, who was asked to write verses on Philip II Titian's paintings, mentions Prometheus as well as Tityus (!). In 1776, when Ponz took the inventory of the Alcázar, he identifies Tityus as Prometheus. Pedro de Madrazo, in 1843, and Wilhem Suida, in 1935, made the same mistake. Prints, made after Titian's painting, were entitled Prometheus. This is the case for that of Cornelius Cort (1566), 38 × 29 cm (examples in Madrid, Biblioteca del Palacio; Munich, Kupferstich-Kabinett; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale), and that of Martino Rota (1570), from Cort. There is also a drawing of Tityus by Titian in the Louvre, from the collection of Mariette (inventory n°5518), pen and bistre, 127 × 103 mm, which used to be entitled Prometheus.

[109] Prometheus Bound (1611-1612), by Pieter Paul Rubens, oil on canvas, 244 × 210 cm, Philadephia Museum of Art: The W.P. Wilstach Collection.

An element of horror is added in Rubens' painting, inasmuch as the talons of the eagle[110] are gripping Prometheus' forehead. One of the main additions to the composition of Titian's painting is the main attribute of Prometheus, his torch of fire, burning in the bottom left corner of the painting. The painter Jacob Jordaens, friend and occasional collaborator of Rubens, painted his own Prometheus Bound (c.1640, fig.4)[111]

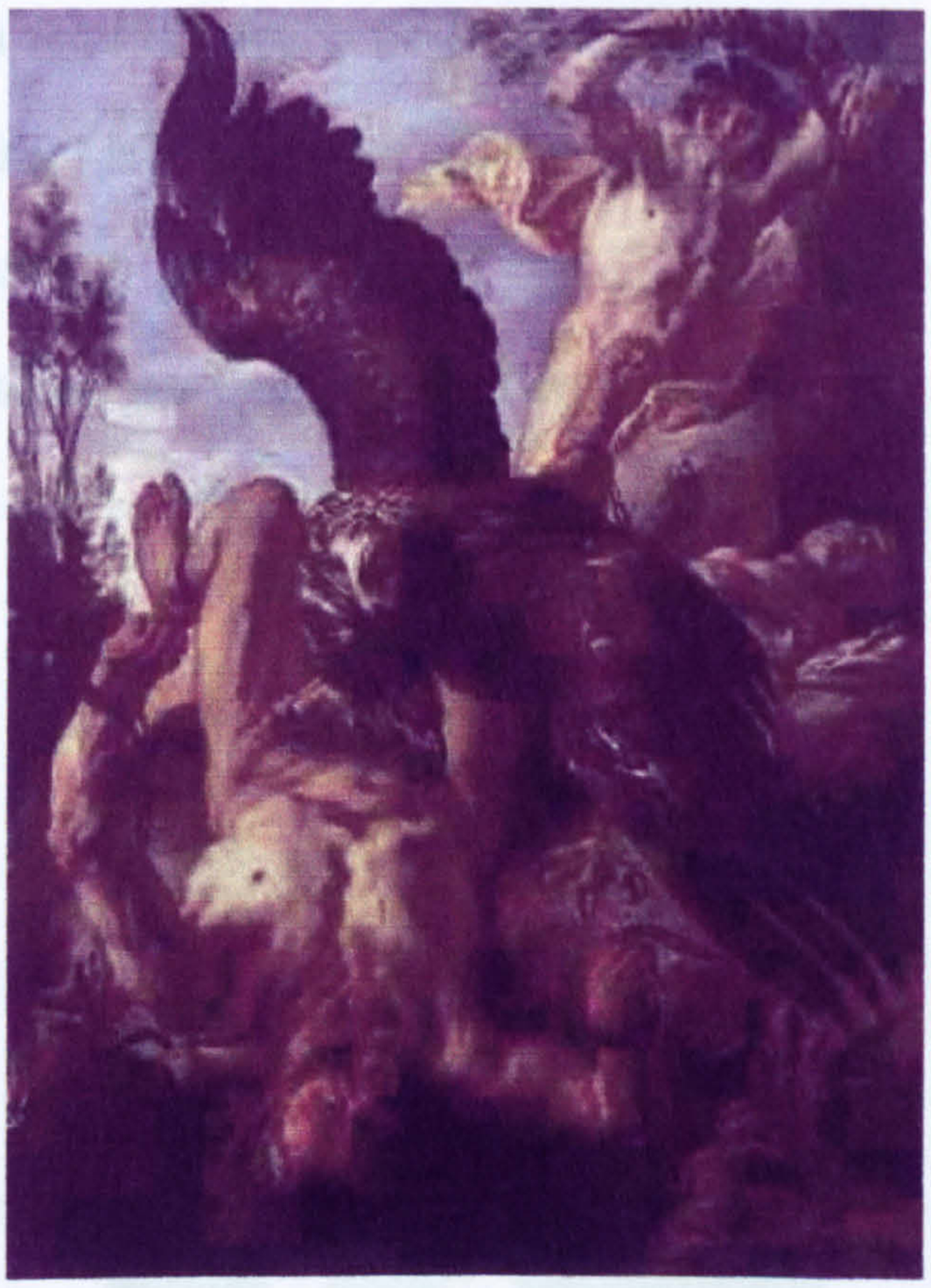

Fig.4

almost thirty years after the execution of Rubens' painting. It could be claimed that Jordaens was also influenced by Titian's Tityus, but, if he was, it was probably indirectly, through Rubens' painting. Indeed, the setting of Rubens' painting, with the

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[110] The eagle in Rubens' painting was depicted by Frans Snyders, who was a specialist in the depiction of animals and birds.

[111] Prometheus Bound (c.1640), by Jacob Jordaens, oil on canvas, 245 × 178 cm, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Köln.

trees, and the blue cloth thrown on the rock to which Prometheus is bound, seems to be almost identical. The very posture of Prometheus is almost the same as in Titian's and Rubens' paintings, but Jordaens, instead of representing the Titan from a three-quarters perspective, chose to represent Prometheus in a frontal way. The originality of Jordaens' depiction of the martyrdom of Prometheus comes from the introduction of Hercules, in the top right corner of the painting, about to kill the eagle with one of his arrows. Thus, a form of hope is introduced in the painting, and shows that the suffering of Prometheus is coming to an end. Eventually, around 1660, Luca Giordano painted an admirable Prometheus (fig.5),[112] which adopted a similar focus on Prometheus, since he is once again depicted wriggling with pain under the torture of the eagle, bound to his rock, and again, in a similar posture, his head tilted back and his knees bent.

Fig.5

[112] Prometeo (Prometheus) (c.1660), by Luca Giordano, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

However, Giordano interestingly chose to represent Prometheus vertically, and not lying on the rock. This, highlighted with a remarkable chiaroscuro, gives Prometheus' body an incredible grace and beauty, and makes that scene of torture even more dramatic. Thus, if we examine the paintings that were directly or indirectly inspired by Titian's Tityus, we can see that the pictorial representation of Prometheus for one century did not radically evolve. The focus on Prometheus' chastisement (and therefore on the theme of revolt) was shared by those artists, who opted for very similar compositions. This contributed to establish what we could call a traditional pictorial representation of Prometheus, which subsisted throughout the centuries, but from which nineteenth century artists would depart. It was important to mention these works in order to take the measure of the originality brought to the treatment of the Prometheus myth from the eve of the nineteenth century.

d. Towards the Nineteenth Century

From the seventeenth century until the turn of the nineteenth century, the changes brought to the Prometheus myth that would influence and lead to the nineteenth century interpretations of the myth were rare. This is why I shall now limit myself to a very brief survey of what happened to the story of the Prometheus myth.[113] During the seventeenth century, a general stagnation of the myth could be witnessed, with the exception of Calderon's La Estatua de Prometeo,[114] which appeared as the superb synthesis of the Renaissance interpretations of the myth, and which added many

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[113] Again, one can refer to T.P.L.E., by Raymond Trousson for a detailed history of the myth during that period, pp.195-300.

[114] La Estatua de Prometeo, by Pedro Calderon de la Barca, Obras completas, tome I, ed. by A. Valbuena Briones, Aguilar, Madrid, 1959

symbolic and original elements to the myth, making the play very rich but also difficult to interpret. Calderon's play is also the illustration of a phenomenon which started developing during the seventeenth century: the cross-fertilisation of the Pygmalion and the Prometheus myth, a phenomenon which fully developed in the nineteenth century. For more consistency and clarity, we shall come back to Calderon's play and to the cross-fertilisation of the myths at the appropriate time.

The main interest shown in Prometheus at that time came from philosophers, the first being Hobbes,[115] who, in 1669, saw in the Titan the condemnable embodiment of political rebellion and democracy (according to Hobbes, the only pure and true power was monarchy). The interpretation of Prometheus from a social perspective flourished during the eighteenth century and the enlightenment. Diderot, along the lines of the Renaissance, considered him as the benefactor of mankind, inasmuch as he brought knowledge to mankind; the eagle, in this context, was "the emblem of deep meditation and loneliness".[116] Because Jean-Jacques Rousseau, like Diderot, saw in Prometheus the initiator of civilisation, in his Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts,[117] he presented the Titan as the corruptor of mankind, who took mankind away from their idyllic primitive state. It is also crucial to notice that at that stage in the evolution of the myth, Prometheus was not apprehended as a man, but only as a god, or an image somehow separated from men, and that he only represented the spirit of revolt

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[115] In Man and Citizen : " De Homine" and " De Cive", by Thomas Hobbes, ed. by Bernard Gert, trans. by C.T. Wood and T.S.K. Scoot-Craig, Hackett Publishing co., 1991

[116] Quoted in Sous le signe de la Révolution, ed. by Jacques Réattu, Musée de la Révolution Française, Actes Sud, 2000, p.47

[117] In Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes - Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ed. by Jacques Roger, Garnier Flammarion, Paris, 1995

for Voltaire[118] and Wieland.[119] Indeed, according to Voltaire, Prometheus' human revolt is justified by the unfairness and evil of Jupiter,[120] and according to Christoph Martin Wieland, who takes the opposite view from Rousseau, Prometheus showed men that the original sin did not doom mankind, but on the contrary put them on the path of progress and greatness. In this respect, those two thinkers truly paved the way for the forthcoming interpretations of Prometheus.

Eventually, one last interpretation of the myth, which also left its trace, has to be mentioned: that of the Earl of Shaftesbury. In his Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author, Shaftesbury praises the poet who can create from inner forms, and not through imitation, which leads him to say that "Such a Poet is indeed a second maker, a just Prometheus under Jove". The importance of Shaftesbury relies on the fact that he is the first to widen the symbol of Prometheus as an artist: he is not limited to the role of a sculptor anymore, and he is fully a creator. He is still compared to Jove and is still subordinate to him, but Goethe was soon to push Prometheus' power even further.

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[118] In Pandore, by Voltaire, Oeuvres Complètes, nouvelle édition, 52 volumes, Garnier, Paris, 1877-1885

[119] In Beiträge zur geheimen Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes und Herzens, and Ueber die Von J.J.Rousseau vorgeschlagenen Versuche den Wahren Stand der Natur des Menschen, by Christopher Martin Wieland, Sämmtliche Werke, 53 volumes, G.J. Göschen, Leipzig, 1818-1828

[120] On the contrary, Christian thinkers such as Servandoni, Prometheus is the embodiment of the danger of the development of sciences, which makes man forget that he remains the creature of God. According to them, the only possible conclusion of the story of Prometheus is his reconciliation with Zeus. Cf. T.P.L.E., pp.275-276.

II. The Turning-Point of the Nineteenth Century: From Myth to Symbol

1. Genius and Creation: Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

In 1814, More than forty years after the 1773 Prometheus fragment, Goethe, reflecting on the importance of the titanic figure in his own life, draws a parallel between Prometheus and himself. Indeed, the writer relates the fact that at a time when he was in search of his independence, his talent appeared to him as "the most reliable guarantee"[121] of it. Cherishing the thought that his entire existence would grow from this gift, "This idea transformed itself in an image; an old mythological figure stroke [him], that of Prometheus, who, separated from the gods, peoples an entire world from the back of his workshop. [Goethe] felt one cannot produce something remarkable without isolating oneself. [His] works which had been so successful were the fruits of solitude."[122]

It is not surprising to find such a parallel coming from Goethe's pen, knowing that, in his Shakespeare Rede (1771), he compared the English genius with Prometheus, inasmuch as "he created human beings in his image".[123] Therefore, the comparison with the Titan being essentially based on an artistic level, it could explain why Goethe's 1773 drama, Prometheus, remained unfinished, and why, on three occasions, he treated the Prometheus myth. As we shall see, the impact of the Prometheus fragment, of Pandora, and, above all, of his poem entitled Prometheus was of

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[121] Quoted in Prométhée, Faust, Frankenstein, Fondements imaginaires de l'éthique, by Dominique Lecourt, Biblio essais, Paris, 1996

[122] In Werke 5. Aus meinem Leben; Dichtung und Warheit, XV, Winkler, Munich, 1973

[123] In Notes to Goethe's Poems, volume I (1749-1786), by James Boyd, Blackwell, Oxford, 1944, p.76

tremendous importance, and marked the origin of the main turning-point in the history of the Prometheus myth.

a. The two Prometheus and Pandora

The 1773 Dramatic Fragment

In 1773, Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, aged twenty-four, started writing a drama on the subject of Prometheus. In this respect, it is probably important to examine the context in which this writing took place. Indeed, we have to bear in mind that towards 1770, the "*Sturm und Drang*" ("Storm and Stress") movement, represented by a few young men, appeared in Germany. With them, poetry was no longer a matter of structure, metric rules, topoi and other conventions, but an attempt to give an account of individual experiences. "Nature and Genius" became the key words for these young poets, who, against Reason, based their creations on the passionate feeling of their hearts, perceived as a cosmic power. They praised the original unity between man and god, exalted freedom, and therefore assumed that genius made them creators. As Pierre Grappin puts it, "poetry becomes the conquest of man after being a present from divine grace".[124] In other terms, the Sturmer und Dranger became the rivals of God. "The original genius does not create from Nature" anymore, "but like Nature".[125] In this background, mythological characters were to take a very special significance for the "*Sturm und Drang*" movement. The young poets rejected any kind of allegorical interpretation of the classical pantheon in order to see in each

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[124] In La théorie du génie dans le préclassicisme allemand, by Pierre Grappin, Paris, 1952, p.13
[125] In Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne,(T.L.P.E.), by Raymond Trousson, Droz, Geneva, 1964, p.305

mythological figure its intrinsic poetical value. They gave them a new life, often identifying with them, and therefore "haunting" them.[126] They saw in the ancient figures the pure type of mankind, and they wanted to use this energy in their work. However, there was one major difference between the representation of mythological figures in Ancient Greece, and that in the works of the "Sturmer und Dranger". Indeed, as Trousson puts it, paraphrasing F. Strich, "(Goethe) understood [...] that the Greeks' efforts had been the will to divinise the human being, and not to humanise the divine."[127] This is an element which we have to bear in mind during the examination of Goethe's Prometheus. In order to understand what might have inspired Goethe and the Stürmer, it is also essential to mention, before starting the analysis of the Prometheus fragment, that the Sturm and Drang artists' deep interest in Prometheus came from their knowledge of the Earl of Shaftesbury's Soliloquy, or Advice to an author (1710), in which the philosopher puts forward the idea that poetry is superior to plastic arts, in that it creates non existing objects and transcends the reproduction of models, transcends the principle of imitation. As mentioned at the end of the previous section, according to Shaftesbury, "Such a poet is indeed a second maker, a just Prometheus under Jove".[128] This English influence already shows a community of thought between Germany and England, to which we shall return. The significance of Goethe's Prometheus fragment is complex, and the subject has been extensively

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[126] See, for example, Lenz as Tantalus, but also Klinger and Maler Müller, who both identified with the Titans.
[127] In T.P.L.E., p.311
[128] The influence of Shaftesbury on the Sturm and Drang artist was thoroughly analysed in Das Prometheussymbol Von Shaftesbury zu Goethe, by Oskar Walzel, in Wortkunst, Heft VII, München, 1932. It is worth noticing that George Chapman, in The Shadow of the Night (1594), in The Poems of George Chapman, by Phyllis Brooks Bartlett, Russell and Russell, New York, 1962, appeared as Shaftesbury's predecessor concerning this particular use of the Prometheus myth, since in this work, he named "Promethean poets" those who knew how to invent and create, as opposed to the artists who limit themselves to repetition and imitation.

discussed by literary critics. We shall therefore focus our examination of Prometheus on its significance within the context of the evolution of Prometheus as the pillar of a myth and as a persona.

In this work, which remained uncompleted,[129] the depiction of the Titan appears as a legacy from the Ancients.[130] Prometheus being the creator of mankind and of civilisation, the first act is clearly concentrated on him as plasticator, and the second on Prometheus as the educator of mankind. Nonetheless, possibly because of Goethe's own identification with Prometheus, especially in the first act, the work appears as a milestone in the evolution of the myth.

PROMETHEUS. *I will not! Tell them that!*

And there's an end of it: I won't.

Their will against mine.

One against one-

I'd call it even.[131]

These are the opening lines of Goethe's drama. *In medias res*, these words, coming from Prometheus, allow us to notice a major change in the interpretation of the Prometheus myth, and also to have a clear insight into Goethe's Titan's main characteristic. The power of Prometheus equals that of the gods, and this equality is dependent on his intelligence, his independence of mind, and his power of creation.

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[129] The original manuscript, given to Fraulein de Stein, was only found again in 1878. In 1818, a copy coming from the Lenz legacy was handed in to Goethe, who published it in 1830 in tome XXXIII of his works.
[130] Concerning the possible sources of the fragment, see T.P.L.E., pp.312-313
[131] In Prometheus, by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, in Early Verse Drama and Prose Plays, Edited by Cyrus Hamlin and Frank Ryder, translated by Robert M. Browning, Michael Hamburger, Cyrus Hamlin, and Frank Ryder. Suhrkamp Publishers, New York, 1988, p.240

Indeed, later in the drama, from lines 128 to 131, Prometheus, addressing himself to Athena, adds:

What sort of claim

Do the proud dwellers of Olympus

Think they have upon my powers?

They are mine and mine to use.

The powers mentioned here are referred to, in the immediate context (line 126), as "creative powers". Prometheus puts them forward as a part of his essence, something the gods "cannot rob [him] of" (line 74). This power is reaffirmed later, when Prometheus claims:

I too can think my goddess,

And I too have power.[132] (lines 137-138)

As Jacqueline Duchemin puts it, commenting on these two lines, "Here is the essential theme, the dominant – and domineering – trait of his (Goethe's) Prometheus, and himself. Borne off out of time by an intuition which makes him immediately perceive his own genius, he feels he is eternal like immortal beings."[133]Surely, these lines, which imply the primacy of an inner form in the matter of creation, confirm the nature of Goethe's link with Prometheus: that of identification.

In this respect, we have to mention what Jacqueline Duchemin regards as "revealing inconsistencies"[134] in the fragment. As a matter of fact, Prometheus, though presented as the creator of mankind, changes his condition for ours in the most famous lines of

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[132] *Ibid.*, p.243.
[133] In Prométhée, histoire du mythe, de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes, (P.H.M.) by Jacqueline Duchemin, Les Belles Lettres, paris, 2000, p.122
[134] In P.H.M., p.124

the play, which, as we shall see later, are very similar to the tone and style of the 1774 poem:

What was the forge of my manhood

If not almighty Time,

My lord and yours?[135] (lines 29-31)

Jacqueline Duchemin actually sees in these three lines the spontaneity of a young poet totally identifying with his characters.[136] We certainly cannot entirely deny the veracity of this element, but we also have to bear in mind that, if Prometheus had not presented himself as a man (more precisely a "Promethean man", as we shall see), his kingdom being the earth, his accusations towards the Olympian gods could well have backfired on him. Prometheus does not want to overthrow the gods to replace them. Indeed, this is not the implication of his equality to them. If we take the measure of the change in Prometheus' persona, the main implication of this equality is that the original transgression, based on "hubris" in the primitive and intermediate myths, does not exist anymore. Pride is not an element that has to be taken into account in Goethe's Prometheus.

In actual fact, the only supreme force Prometheus recognises is Destiny,[137] and all the Olympian gods also have to submit themselves to this power. It is probably on this essential subordination that the equality between Prometheus and the other gods is founded in Goethe's fragment. This crucial aspect is introduced in the play by the

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[135] In Prometheus, by Goethe, translated by Browning, Hamburger, Hamlin, and Ryder, Suhrkamp Publishers, New York, 1988, p.240.
[136] In P.H.M., p.124
[137] Cf. lines 23-24 and 45-47 in Prometheus, by Goethe, translated by Browning, Hamburger, Hamlin, and Ryder. Suhrkamp Publishers, New York, 1988, pp.240-241.

omnipresent theme of the vassal/master relationship. If Goethe's Prometheus is so concerned with freedom, it is essentially because he had to conquer it. At the beginning of the play, Prometheus rejects any kind of negotiation with Mercury, the messenger of Zeus and the Olympian gods.

Now leave me; I'll serve no vassal! (line 48)

Further in the text, Prometheus refuses "To be their steward/ And to guard their heaven" (lines 68-69). However, we are informed that this has not always been the case. There is actually a reminder of the fact that Prometheus helped the Olympian gods to get rid of the Titans (lines 139-150), when his character tells Athena that, in the fear of what they could do, he "[bore] the burden they/ Made solemn show to place upon [his] shoulders"(lines 141-142).

In this context, it is fruitful to make a parallel between Æschylus' Prometheus and that of Goethe. In Prometheus Bound, the eponymous character refused to submit himself to the power of the god to whom he was once allied, and with whom he was once equal. On the other hand, in Goethe's fragment, the situation is very different: it appears that Prometheus was originally inferior to the gods, and in charge of their safety. Therefore, as Jacqueline Duchemin puts it, Goethe's Prometheus "equals the personal gods with all the rush of his powerful will, aware of the superhuman value of human genius."[138] The very context in which Prometheus' persona is apprehended is therefore different, and the actions of the Titan find legitimacy in Goethe's Prometheus. One character in particular plays a very important role in defining this aspect.

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[138] In P.H.M, p.125

Even if the link between the Goddess Athena (Minerva in Goethe's text) and Prometheus was not established by Goethe,[139] this ancient association reaches its climax in his work.

Minerva: I honour my father,
And I love you, Prometheus[140]

Of course, we must not interpret Minerva's words literally here, and we shall see why by examining the nature of her relationship with Prometheus. However, the link uniting the Titan and the goddess immediately appears as very tight. Indeed, in order to create mankind and Pandora as well as to accomplish all his work for men, the Titan depicted by the German writer is helped by the goddess. To understand the full significance of this collaboration, we first have to keep in mind the fact that Athena – especially after the writing of the Eumenides by Æschylus – personifies divine thought, a characteristic inherited from her mother Mêtis. This has a tremendous effect on the significance that the Prometheus myth takes on. In actual fact, whereas Athena was traditionally on her father's side, in Goethe's 1773 Prometheus, the goddess gives her approval to the Titan. Prometheus, at first, rejects Athena's help to give life to his creatures when she intervenes as the representative of Zeus. He does not want any form of alienation for his creatures. However, Minerva eventually decides to give this power to Prometheus in her own name, and to lead him to the source of life. In this very "rallying" lies Prometheus' symbolic victory. Divine wisdom being on Prometheus' side, the acts of the Titan are seen in a new light. From

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[139] See Supra, I, c.
[140] In Prometheus, by Goethe, translated by Browning, Hamburger, Hamlin, and Ryder, Suhrkamp Publishers, New York, 1988, p.242.

this point, Prometheus becomes a symbol of intelligence confronting an oppressive and arbitrary power.

This symbol is even strengthened by the fact that Prometheus and Athena seem to be one:

Prometheus: And you are to my spirit

As it is to itself [...]

And thus with you and me

One in spirit always

My love for you eternal! [141]

Prometheus is a creator because Minerva gives him the power to give life to his creatures. We have previously mentioned that the genius, according to Goethe, creates "like Nature", which implies that he is driven by an inner form. Prometheus' relationship with Minerva, in this fragment, comes as the illustration of this conception. In actual fact, Minerva being the animative principle, she had to be part of Prometheus. This element therefore explains why, in Goethe's Prometheus, she completes the Titan. It leads Raymond Trousson to conclude that the "animative power symbolised by Minerva is thus in Prometheus himself, immanent and not transmitted, totally part of his own being".[142] The nature of the association between Prometheus and Minerva also makes Goethe's point that one cannot create something great without isolating oneself. This is probably why Prometheus, in the fragment, does not want his "kingdom", the earth, to be touched by the Olympian gods. A

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[141] *Ibid.*, pp.242-243.
[142] In T.P.L.E., p. 317

definite fracture is established with Heaven. The famous verses that follow emphasise this segmentation, and Prometheus' will to protect his creatures.

Look down, oh Zeus,

Upon my world. It lives,

And I have shaped it in my likeness,

A race to be like me,

To suffer, weep, enjoy, to have its pleasure,

And pay no heed to you-

No more than I do.[143]

However, we have to underline the fact that Prometheus' wish is not to create another world in which he could be another Zeus. From lines 92 to 97, Prometheus mentions that men are in fact images of himself:

Here's my world, my all!

Here I know who I am!

Here- all my wishes

Embodied in these figures,

My spirit split in a thousand ways

Yet whole in my beloved children.[144]

The world the Titan creates for mankind has to be based on freedom, sustained by the idea of equality. It is worthy of note that Epimetheus (line 84) accuses his brother of depriving his creatures of the happiness of harmony, precisely because the Titan

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[143] In Prometheus, by Goethe, translated by Browning, Hamburger, Hamlin, and Ryder, Suhrkamp Publishers, New York, 1988, p.246.
[144] *Ibid.*, p.242.

wants to protect them from the gods. Even though the fragment remains unfinished, we can assume that young Goethe had planned a reconciliation with the gods. Two facts confirm this assumption, the intervention by Epimetheus, and the last stage direction on the manuscript, which mentions that Minerva returns once more in the name of the Olympian gods in order to find an agreement. Therefore, the isolation preached by Goethe was probably just the first stage in the process of creation. In this respect, such a conception of the artist and of creation is necessarily linked to an aesthetic. As Trousson remarks, "Going by his creative power, Goethe doubles his existence with an essence, defines himself and rejects the submission to a personal divinity whose principle would be identical to the one that animates him. If the metaphysical revolt is unquestionably present in the fragment, nevertheless, it does not come first, but second: it is the result and not the origin of his conception of the poet."[145] If the first act of the fragment essentially deals with this matter, the nature of the second act is very different. Whereas Prometheus was essentially seen as a creator in the first part of the play, in the second, he is exclusively depicted as a legislator, the educator of mankind and founder of civilisation. That is to say that, in the second act, the creation of Prometheus is strictly mankind, and not the poem, as was implied in the first act. As Trousson puts it, "from the new hero created by Goethe, we come back to the traditional mythological hero".[146] The attempts to explain this "gap" between the two acts of Prometheus have been numerous, and, in this matter, we have to agree with Trousson,[147] who reminds us that young Goethe had read widely and

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[145] In T.P.L.E., p. 326
[146] *Ibid.*
[147] *Ibid.*, p. 332

was tormented by many questions. Fiery and enthusiastic as he was, the study of Prometheus led him to scatter his thoughts, and to write spontaneously. This would probably provide a partial explanation for the relative heterogeneity of the play, and, most of all, for its incompleteness.

In the second act of Prometheus, Goethe expresses views on society, which are clearly opposed to Rousseau's.[148] Whereas Rousseau, in an idealised state of Nature, had depicted the original man as good and corrupted only by society and civilisation, Goethe believes in man and shows confidence in progress. However, he does not idealise mankind. Prometheus himself notes, lines 316 to 321:

You've not belied your nature, my children.

You're lazy and industrious,

And gently cruel,

Generously mean,

Like all your brothers in this fate,

Like all the beasts, and like the gods. [149]

Man is animated by mixed feelings, and is by essence complex, according to Goethe, and this is what seems to make his richness. Once again, because the fragment remains unfinished, we cannot exactly tell how mankind would have evolved in Prometheus, but the first fights between men have already started.

Another essential aspect of this second act is the relationship between Prometheus and his creature, Pandora. As we know, she is traditionally regarded as the creature who

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[148] We have to bear in mind that the thought of Rousseau, especially on Nature and society, had a tremendous impact in Europe, to the point that most writers felt that they had to express their views on Rousseau's theories in order to define their own positions.

[149] In Prometheus, by Goethe, translated by Browning, Hamburger, Hamlin, and Ryder, Suhrkamp Publishers, New York, 1988, p.248.

brings sin on earth, and who initiates the fall of men. In Goethe's Prometheus, her status is perfectly antithetical to this perception, since she is Prometheus' favourite creature. We are given this indication in the first act, when Prometheus, observing Pandora (a statue at that stage), says:

And you, Pandora,

Holy vessel of all gifts

That please

Under the wide sky

On the endless earth[150]

These lines reverse the tradition of the Pandora myth, in which the significance of her name, the present of all, is directed towards the destruction of mankind. We must also note that Prometheus, here, does not love Pandora as a woman, but as a daughter. This is how he addresses her, and reciprocally, Pandora calls him "father". In the second act, we therefore observe him telling Pandora about the secrets of life, love and death. Indeed, Pandora is the witness of Mira and Arbar's embrace, and, shocked by the strength of what she is unable to understand, she runs away in order to find her father. Prometheus then explains to Pandora the mystery of love through that of death:

And still there comes a time when all is fulfilled,

Everything we've longed for, dreamed or hoped

Or feared, my beloved. And that time is death.[151]

She appears as a pure being, who brings only satisfaction to her creator and father Prometheus. The fact that even Pandora, who usually embodies the corruption of

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[150] *Ibid.*, p.244.
[151] *Ibid.*, p.250.

mankind, is, in Prometheus, a positive creature emphasises the turning point in the evolution of the myth. Prometheus, though different in the first and second act of Goethe's play, is transfigured by this work. He seems to rebel, less against the god of gods, than against a form of passivity towards fate. Moreover, his antagonism with Zeus is not based on pride or hubris, because, facing destiny, Prometheus and the gods are equal. Goethe's Prometheus is presented as a harbinger of freedom, and above all, as an artist with metaphysical concerns. More than the Prometheus of the second part of the play, whose function as a legislator and educator is directly inherited from mythology, Goethe's Prometheus distinguishes himself as a rebellious artist. This image is probably reinforced by the famous 1774 Prometheus, used as a opening to the third act of the play, which was never written. It therefore appears as a last word, and as the conclusion of the play.

The 1774 Poem

The famous seven-strophe ode Goethe composed in 1774[152] appears as the illustration of Prometheus' revolt against the Olympian gods, but takes another form and value from that expressed in the fragment. As Trousson remarks, "in the fragment, Prometheus ignores the gods, in the ode, he destroys them".[153] The ode, a tempestuous address to Zeus and to the Olympian gods, is the expression of the Promethean revolt, under the form of a lyrical outpouring. Whereas Prometheus, in the fragment, wanted to avoid the gods, he now, in the poem, confronts them. Possibly more than the unachieved play, Goethe's ode was extremely influential in the nineteenth century, particularly in artistic circles, but also, it should be noted, in philosophical circles.

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[152] Published without Goethe's agreement by Jacobi in 1785, and officially in 1789
[153] In T.P.L.E., p.343

In fact, the poem was caught up in the turmoil of the "pantheism quarrel". In 1775, Friedrich H. Jacobi published the poem Goethe had sent him without his authorisation, and without mentioning his name,[154] using the ode as a pure example of Spinozism. Jacobi only published his Letters on Spinoza's Doctrine in 1785, but was already very keen to put forward his mystical and non atheistical interpretation of the philosopher, an interpretation which would become dear to the hearts of most German Romanticists. Goethe, however, did not really approve of such an attempt to restrict his poetry to a philosophical idea. As Boyd notes, "Goethe [...] showed resentment at the unauthorised publication, which, he believed, placed him in a false light".[155] We must also be careful not to link the ode to a philosophical theory, an approach that limits and distorts its poetical impact. However, one major reason for the great influence of the Prometheus poem relates to the two great philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx, who perpetuated the powerful interest which it had already aroused. They did not use the poem in order to adjust it to their theories, but rather used it as a starting point in their thought. A section will be devoted to the two philosophers' apprehension of Prometheus in a further chapter, inasmuch as both of them were extremely influential, but it is now time to examine the ode itself, in order to understand why it had such an impact.

The ode appears as an appeal to Zeus to stop his despotic and cruel attitude in Prometheus' realm, that is earth. From the first strophe, Zeus is referred to as inconsequential and therefore unfair, since he is compared to a child.

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[154] For more information on the subject, refer to Notes on Goethe's Poems, volume I (1749-1786), by James Boyd, Blackwell, Oxford, 1944, pp.73-76

[155] In Notes on Goethe's Poems, volume I (1749-1786), by James Boyd, Blackwell, Oxford, 1944, pp.74-75

Cover your heaven, Zeus,

With cloudy vapors

And like a boy beheading thistles

Practice on oaks and mountain peaks

Still you must leave

My earth intact

The intensity of the call to Zeus is the measure of the gods' power, which is certainly not denied in the poem. However, what is withheld from the gods is their right to be venerated, for they are represented as unjust and unable to feel pity. Prometheus actually challenges their privileges, and their original right to be treated as gods. In the second strophe, they are called "wretched" (line 12), and their coldness occupies the third paragraph, in which Prometheus recalls that, as a child, "not knowing where to turn"(line 22), he tried to find comfort from the gods,

as if above there were

An ear to hear my complaint,

A heart like mine

To take pity on the oppressed (lines 24-27).

But there is only a "sleeper above" (line 36), since Zeus does not deign to look at men, in spite of the adoration of these "Poor hopeful fools" (line 20). Zeus and the Olympian gods, with their coldness and harshness, are therefore totally opposed to Prometheus, whose "holy and glowing heart" (line 32), "Unaided, accomplish[ed] all" (line 33). The implication of such a statement is that men give the power they want to

the gods. Mankind is responsible for it, because, by adoring the gods, by recognising them, men actually make them powerful, make them gods.

As in the Prometheus dramatic fragment, Goethe only recognises one supreme power, that of destiny. But the assertion of this force is so spirited in the ode that the four lines expressing this thought have had a tremendous influence. The climax of the poem, they also contain decisive implications on the evolution of the Prometheus myth. Addressing Zeus, the Titan proclaims:

Was it not omnipotent Time

That forged me into manhood,

And eternal Fate,

My masters and yours? (lines 42-45)

We shall have the opportunity later to discuss the "manhood" of Prometheus in Goethe's work, but, for now, the recognition of Time and Fate as omnipotent relegates the gods to the rank of hollow idols, which the ode breaks. The poem destroys their order to "recreate" a world, based on the faith in mankind and its power. Indeed, Prometheus' address to Zeus and the gods is not purely devastating: it ends up in a cry of victory and in accepting the condition of mankind.

Or did you think perhaps

That I should hate this life,

Flee into deserts

Because not all

The blossoms of dream grew ripe? (lines 46-50)

Therefore, we could be led to believe that the main trait of Prometheus' character as a creator has been replaced by rebellion. However, there is a consistency in Goethe's Prometheus from the dramatic fragment to the ode. Indeed, if the poem does not exactly deal with the figure of the creator, it undeniably does deal with Prometheus' power of creation. As well as being a diatribe against Zeus and the Olympian gods, the Prometheus poem is an invitation to build something new in freedom. The poem actually has an undeniable performative value: Prometheus' language truly breaks the power of gods and builds new possibilities for men. As Trousson puts it, "it is always on his power of creation that Prometheus founds his revolt and his challenge, it is from this certitude he draws his assurance."[156] Prometheus' persona therefore remains coherent. In fact, Prometheus' revolt, as it appears in the ode, derives from the awakening of conscience to genius, an idea sustaining the entire dramatic fragment. It is true that, in the Prometheus poem, this element is emphasised, and, to a certain extent, detached from its context. However, it is the consequence of the awareness of genius. Goethe does not depict two different Prometheus. As Trousson notes, "In the drama, Prometheus fights for his independence. In the ode, he explains his faith. Since the theme of the creator had led Goethe to revolt, revolt leads him to define the very object of this revolt: the ode is a branching of his thought."[157] We could therefore consider the ode as a dive into the Promethean matter and the "ethics" animating the Titan.

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[156] In T. P. L.E., p. 336
[157] *Ibid.*, p. 342

We still have to examine the main consequences of this poem and the Prometheus dramatic fragment within the very evolution of the myth, but we can already perceive that the transformation Goethe introduced in Prometheus' persona mainly relies on his identification with the Titan. It had the effect of giving a new life to Prometheus, thanks to a very intense and powerful expression. It allowed the Prometheus myth to reach another step in its evolution. It is hard to know whether this achievement was in the spirit of the age, because the Prometheus myth had accumulated enough elements to take a new significance, or whether it relied on the great individual Goethe was. Both factors probably had a role to play in the history of the myth. However, thanks to the injustice of the gods and their equal submission to Fate, the actions of Prometheus found legitimacy, and men gained their real freedom. Prometheus, with Goethe, had freed mankind from them. Before examining the transformation Goethe entailed on the Prometheus myth, we still have to mention the last work this myth inspired in Goethe, more than thirty years after the Prometheus dramatic fragment and poem.

Pandora (1807-1808)

Pandora, a complex and uncompleted drama, depicts Prometheus as a character very different from the 1773-1774 Titan. This, of course, could be explained by the fact that Pandora comes as a late work in Goethe's production, a work therefore far from the "Sturm and Drang" aesthetics. Another element in an explanation could be the fact that Pandora only has very loose links with the Prometheus and Pandora myths, and seems to be much more part of a personal mythology. There are undeniably enlightening matters in Pandora, which have to be taken into account in the development of the Prometheus myth, but the fortune of this drama was not as great

as the Prometheus drama, nor as the ode, and its impact on the interpretation of the myth was minor. Therefore, we shall not thoroughly study this work, and will only consider its most important aspects for the understanding of the transformation of the Prometheus myth.

In Autumn 1807, Leo Von Seckendorf and Dr Stoll, on the verge of founding the Prometheus journal, asked Goethe to contribute by writing a few lines, which resulted in the uncompleted Pandora. However, as early as July 1806, the name "Pandora" was mentioned in the writer's diary, beside that of Frau Von Levetzow. Goethe could well have identified her with Pandora, who, to him, was the embodiment of the Ideal. Nonetheless, in the drama, Pandora is not the central character. Late at night, a solitary and nostalgic character (Epimetheus) remembers his past and his youth, until a young man, Phileros (Prometheus' son), interrupts him. The youth announces to Epimetheus that he is deeply in love with a young girl whose name he does not know. This evocation of love makes Epimetheus dream of his unspeakable happiness with Pandora, a long time ago. She was his wife for a few months, and then disappeared for ever, leaving her daughter Epimeleia (the symbol of sorrow) behind. She took with her Elpore, who embodies Hope. When Epimetheus falls asleep just before Dawn, Prometheus makes his appearance, a torch in his hand, to urge the blacksmiths to start working. The Titan then praises his unending activity, the virtue of hard work, and his physical strength. When asked by the shepherds to make musical instruments and tools, Prometheus proudly rejects their enquiry, to reply that he only wants to make guns. While Prometheus works, Elpore appears to Epimetheus in his dreams, and promises him that Pandora will soon come back. However, Epimetheus' dreams

suddenly come to an end when Epimeleia arrives, screaming, running away from Phileros. Overwhelmed by jealousy, the young man has just killed a shepherd, and now tries to hit Epimeleia, accusing her of betrayal in front of Epimetheus and his father, who virulently rebukes Phileros for his actions. Phileros leaves in haste to throw himself into the sea. Epimeleia, devastated, justifies herself and explains the misunderstanding. In the dialogue that follows, Epimetheus tells Prometheus the story of Pandora, the woman the mistrustful Prometheus had himself rejected. The shepherds, to take their revenge for the loss of their fellow, set Epimetheus' house on fire. Epimeleia, mortified, jumps in the fire to kill herself. Eôs then emerges from the sea to announce the imminent union of Phileros and Epimeleia, saved by the will of gods. The fragment of the play stops here.

This account is sufficient to show the tremendous difference which exists between Pandora's Prometheus and the coherent character depicted in 1773 and 1774 by Goethe, although the Titan is not entirely unrecognisable. The character Goethe depicts in Pandora is essentially pragmatic. As Lichtenberger puts it, he represents "all that, in mankind, is a will of power, all that strives towards taming the elements, conquering and exploiting Nature, creating amongst men an organisation, a hierarchy."[158] Paradoxically, as a result of such an approach to reality, Prometheus is plunged into immediate action, in spite of the original meaning of his name, the forethinker. However, if we push this comparison with the origins of the myth a bit further, we can see that Prometheus' persona, once again, is totally opposed to

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158 In Pandore. Goethe., by H. Lichtenberger, Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, fascicule 57, 1932, p.370

Epimetheus'[159]. Yet, the value of this antagonism is different from the one taken in primitive and intermediate versions of the Prometheus myth. Indeed, the opposition of the two brothers in Goethe's Pandora is not based on the traditional antithesis between foresight and hindsight anymore, but on their personae, which appear as complementary.

As truly as Prometheus only praises the value of action in Pandora, Epimetheus' temperament, on the other hand, is nostalgic and dreamy. Epimetheus very much relies on his imaginative power, of which the Prometheus of Pandora is deprived. Whereas Prometheus only values human activity, Epimetheus is passive, fully accepting his destiny. Because of Epimetheus' contemplative attitude, it has been said that the ageing Goethe identified with his character, but it is difficult to agree with this theory. He does not have enough depth for the writer to fully identify with him. On the other hand, although Prometheus is so unyielding that he almost appears as an allegorical figure, Goethe probably felt close to certain traits of his character. In this respect, we could say, with Lichtenberger, that "the interview between the two brothers is in fact a dialogue between the two lobes of [Goethe's] brain"[160]. Such an explanation is particularly interesting, since it would be revealing of a new stage in the Prometheus myth itself. We mentioned in the first part[161] of this work Karl Kérényi's theory about the duo Epimetheus-Prometheus: according to him the two brothers would have been, like Plato's androgyne, a unique and complete being divided into two. Though relevant and fruitful, this conception was difficult to justify

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[159] See *Supra*, I, p.15
[160] In Pandore. Goethe., by H. Lichtenberger, Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, fascicule 57, 1932, p.369
[161] See *Supra*, I, p.15

with the primitive and intermediate myths. However, Goethe's depiction of the two brothers, to a large extent, backs up Kérényi's explanation. In actual fact, the construction, perpetuation and evolution of a myth relies on the understanding and interpretation of its components. Because men are in charge of this process, the shape a myth takes depends on history, but mainly on sociological and psychological factors. What we call the collective unconscious, in this respect, is at stake when we take the evolution of a myth into account. An individual work can give a precious insight into this collective unconscious, and Goethe's works are interesting in this respect: if his two Prometheus were so influential, it is probably because they appeared as the expression of many elements present in the collective unconscious at a given time. On the other hand, as we mentioned earlier, Pandora being a very personal work with its own symbols and imagery, its influence on the Prometheus myth is practically indiscernible. That is, if we except the relationship between Prometheus and Epimetheus, which clearly derives from intermediate myths, and appears as the product of a long maturation. The opposition of the two brothers being based on something deeper than the foresight/hindsight antithesis, namely two conceptions of the world, the value this duo takes is decisive. According to the drafts Goethe left behind, he intended to reach a harmonious unity by the end of the play, and, inevitably, a balance between the brothers' two antagonistic conceptions of the world. As a matter of fact, after Goethe's Pandora, it is worth noting that Epimetheus almost entirely disappears from derivative works on the Prometheus myth. Could we then assume that this fact points out the accomplishment of a phase within the Prometheus myth? Given that such a disappearance would logically entail the completion of

Prometheus' persona, it is even more interesting to notice that this event coincides with the humanisation of Prometheus.

b. The Titan Becoming Man

As Jacqueline Duchemin remarked, Prometheus' humanisation was certainly a natural event within the "dynamis" of the myth[162]. Goethe's partial identification with the Greek character combined with his great talent undeniably played a part in this turning-point. Moreover, the works produced by the German artist on the subject of the Titan also arrived at a favourable time. Works on Prometheus, as we have already noted, are countless, and we do not intend to say that Prometheus' humanisation was unheard of before Goethe. He very possibly had precursors in his new perception and interpretation of Prometheus' persona. However, the German writer was undoubtedly responsible for Prometheus' great fortune once the Titan's status changed. A myth being a cultural product which evolves thanks to a process of inheritance and individual creation, we could say that Prometheus' humanisation appears as the result of the favourable conjunction of time and a personal creation, that of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe[163]. In fact, we must remember that the constitution and evolution of a myth is inevitably involved in time and history, and implies a series of metamorphoses. If myths appeal so much to men, it is surely because they are moored in their origins, but also because they are perpetually renewed by each generation. Therefore, Prometheus' gain of manhood appears as the product of a natural process

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[162] In P.H.M., p.124

[163] It is worth mentioning, in this respect, that despite Goethe's inspiration and talent, his Pandora had no great influence on the perception of the mythological character. As a matter of fact, his attempt to give a positive ethos to the first woman did not change the general interpretation of the Pandora myth. This is why we noticed earlier that Pandora was more relevant to a personal myth than to the Pandora myth as such.

within the "dynamis" and dialectic at stake in the formation of the Prometheus myth. From this historical point of view, we must add that Goethe's ode influenced the spirits of the time more than his Prometheus fragment did, since the latter was published sixty years after its production in 1773, not until 1833, when Romanticism was already established. The fragment, in this respect, did not properly shape the Romantic interpretation of the Prometheus myth. On the contrary, the ode played an important part in this formation, and it is not fortuitous if, within the poem itself, the lines which are most commented upon are the climactic:

Was it not omnipotent Time

That forged me into manhood,

And eternal Fate,

My masters and yours?[164]

Indeed, they directly deal with Prometheus' manhood, a trait which was the main innovation of Goethe, and on which the turning-point of the Prometheus myth in the nineteenth century was based. We have already noticed that the essential issue of the myth, in Goethe's works, shifts from that of Hesiod and Æschylus in their treatment of the subject of Prometheus, in which the essential question was that of evil and its consequence, i.e. the transgression of divine power through hubris. The passage quoted above is enlightening when we take this aspect into account: because the Olympian gods have to submit to "eternal Fate", as does Prometheus, and, because the real power comes from this immanent "Moira", the notion of guilt based on pride becomes irrelevant. From then on, the focus of Goethe's Prometheus appears to be

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[164] In Goethe, Selected Poems, edited by Christopher Middleton, Translated by Michael Hamburger, Princeton University Press, 1983, l. 42-45

man's power of creation, which includes its condition of existence and Prometheus' fight for it. Indeed, these four lines emphasise this shift and show the humanisation of Prometheus, who decided to change his condition for that of men. As Jacqueline Duchemin puts it[165], they also mark the birth of the Promethean man, a notion to which we shall return later. As mentioned earlier, she actually points out that there is an inconsistency in these four famous lines by Goethe, which, according to her, must be imputed to his youth. This is the explanation she gives for the fact that Prometheus "changes his condition for ours", since in Goethe's poem, the Titan is also the creator of mankind. She wonders if the German writer "wanted it fully and consciously", if "he could not control his cry", and eventually chose this second hypothesis. However, things are probably more complex: we have to keep in mind that, although the ode was later placed at the end of the Prometheus fragment, as a climax and a conclusion to it, they were originally independent. If the role of Prometheus as a sculptor and therefore tangible creator of mankind is largely elaborated upon in the play, we must not assume that the Prometheus depicted in the ode is totally similar to his dramatic counterpart. Moreover, even though Prometheus' power of creation is probably the most apparent aspect of his persona in the fragment, he is also described as the educator of mankind in the play, and that is a trait we must remember in the interpretation of the poem. In the passages related to Prometheus' creation of mankind, our reading must surely not be a literal one.

When Prometheus, addressing himself to the Gods, pronounces the four famous lines, the meaning of "manhood" must certainly not be restricted to the idea of a

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[165] In P.H.M., p.124

common biological nature. We would certainly have to interpret it as a condition which is shared by all men. Indeed, when Prometheus evokes his childhood and the disappointment of his prayers addressed to the gods, in the third strophe of the ode, it appears that it is this deep feeling and not simply his nature which has led him to free himself from the gods.

Once, too, a child,

Not knowing where to turn,

I raised bewildered eyes

Up to the sun, as if above there were

An ear to hear my complaint,

A heart like mine

To take pity on the oppressed.

Manhood, in this context, would be defined in relation to the Gods' oppression, and also by what can be perceived as a common sensitivity. Men are defined in opposition to the coldness and cruelty of the gods. It is certainly on this basis that Prometheus identifies with men, whether he is their creator or not. As a matter of fact, Prometheus glorifies a special quality which seems to be, according to the Titan himself, the main attribute of mankind. This quality, to which Prometheus refers twice, is a "glowing heat" (lines 10 and 32). In the first occurrence of this expression, it is attributed to Prometheus' "kingdom", the earth (line 7), and, by extension, to men, its inhabitants. Further in the ode, Prometheus uses exactly the same term to describe his own principal power:

Did not my holy and glowing heart,

Unaided, accomplish all? (lines 32 and 33)

The addition of the adjective "holy" reminds us of Prometheus' divine nature, and therefore of a certain ascendance over men, but it is also clear that an identity exists between Prometheus and mankind, an identity which essentially relies on this quality of heart and feelings. Indeed, the glow Prometheus presents as the pillar of his works, of which gods themselves are deprived, is also part of the essence of Man. It seems that Prometheus' essential sensitivity of heart is also his main legacy and gift to mankind, and this would explain why Prometheus claims his manhood. From this angle, it is interesting to observe that the original gift of fire is understood here in a metaphorical and symbolic way, since the heat of the flame is instilled in the human heart. In this context, the flame does not appear as a symbol of knowledge or of passionate love, but as another form of love, which would be a great generosity, in the sense of sympathy for fellow men.

We have to pay equal attention to a second important expression in the poem, which also gives us an indication of the way we have to interpret Prometheus' manhood. When, in the final strophe, he exclaims:

Here I sit, forming men

In my image,

A race to resemble me:

We must probably not limit the meaning of "forming" to the acts of a sculptor or statuary. Indeed, the following lines would invite us to see Prometheus, in this last strophe, as the educator of mankind more than as its tangible creator:

To suffer, to weep,

To enjoy, to be glad,

And never to heed you, like me!

Prometheus, here, refers to the emotional side of men, the one he is proud to share with them, as opposed to the passive indifference of gods. In this context, we cannot but think of the episode of the Prometheus Fragment, in which Prometheus explains love and death to Pandora. If Prometheus "forms" men, in the ode, this is probably as an educator, and a father, as was already the case in the second act of the Prometheus fragment. Therefore, we do not see in Prometheus' claim of manhood an inconsistency of young Goethe so much as the accomplishment of both the fragment and the ode in the coronation of the Promethean man. It is with this event that the nineteenth century turning-point in the Prometheus myth is really initiated.

As Trousson opined[166], "creative talent frees the man of genius from the gods: he does not need them". This is probably Goethe's main legacy to the history of the Prometheus myth, and could be a definition of the Promethean man. His trust in his own ability to create delivers him from the gods, and, more importantly, from his responsibility for evil, and his guilt resulting from the loss of the golden age. Trousson pursues his analyses by mentioning that "[Prometheus] stopped trusting the [gods] the day he realised that the wisdom and power he attributed to them was only dependent on his own faith. From this day, he has known there was nothing they could do to him if he provided himself with the weapon of his belief; he is the master of earth and of his existence: so there is no reason to fear gods."[167] This same event, that is the moment Prometheus becomes aware of the fact that, to a certain extent, gods are the

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[166] In T.P.L.E. p.321
[167] *Ibid.*

creation of his faith, appears as an act of liberation which coincides with the birth of the Promethean man. Such a change in the perception of Prometheus, as we shall see later with Shelley, cannot but have an impact on the very conception of the world order. In this context, the Prometheus myth, in its content and interpretation, was about to change dramatically, and its very value was to appear in a new light. Goethe's interpretation of Prometheus entailed a strong reaction from his contemporaries, and it is important to examine the works which derived from Goethe's perception of Prometheus, in order to grasp its importance.

c. Prometheus, Goethe, and Music

Goethe's interpretations of Prometheus did not only have a strong influence on poets and writers of his time. Goethe actually deeply influenced musicians, and his interpretations of the Prometheus myth proved to be extremely stimulating for composers, who felt particularly inspired[168]. Even though the composition of Beethoven's The Creatures of Prometheus, op.43 was enticed by Salvatore Vigano, the famous court-ballet master, the atmosphere of the piece reflects Goethe's new interpretation of the myth. Indeed, Beethoven and Goethe had a strong admiration for each other[169], and Beethoven was fascinated by Goethe's writings. There is no doubt he knew Goethe's ode when he composed his symphonic work, which was premiered in March 1801 in Vienna's Burgtheater. The scenario on which Beethoven and Vigano worked is lost, but Beethoven, in his musical piece, clearly emphasised the

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[168] Johann Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752-1814) set Goethe's ode into music, and later composers such as Jan Willem Frans Brandt-Buys (1868-1933), Julius Röntgen (1855-1932) op.99, and more notoriously Hugo Wolf (1860-1903), Goethe Lieder n°49, all set Prometheus into music.

[169] Even if, when they eventually met, this admiration proved to be limited to the artistic level. Beethoven found Goethe too "bourgeois", and Goethe found Beethoven too wild.

greatness and triumphant character of Prometheus, as shown by the outbursts of fortissimo and the dynamic syncopated rhythms of the overture[170].

However, if the link between Goethe's ode and Beethoven's Creatures of Prometheus is not explicit, Schubert composed a lieder on Goethe's Prometheus ode. Franz Schubert first treated the Prometheus subject in 1816, when he wrote a cantata entitled Prometheus[171], for soli, chorus and orchestra. Three years later, he set Goethe's ode to music and sent Prometheus[172], together with other lieder, to the German poet, who famously returned the lieder to their sender, without even opening the parcel. If, unfortunately, we do not have Goethe's opinion on Schubert's lieder, on the other hand, the lied itself gives us a very precise interpretation of Goethe's poem, a "reading in music" which, besides its artistic quality and originality, appears as an interesting testimony of the reception of Goethe's ode. The aim of the following analysis is not to be exhaustive, detailed, or technical, as we would weaken the links between the ode and its musical version.

Even though we are dealing with two different media, to set a poem to music is an interpretation of the original poem in itself. Schubert did not limit himself to reproducing, through the musical medium, the general atmosphere of the poem: the different movements of the poem can be found in the lied, with all their contrasts, and climaxes also transposed into music, at the scale of the phrase, as well as at the scale of the word. In order to do so, Schubert, in this lied, made a very elaborate use of

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[170] The final theme of the ballet was interestingly used by Beethoven in the finale of the Heroic Symphony, originally entitled Bonaparte Symphony by the composer. In this regard, it is important to note that there was a Romantic tradition associating Prometheus with Napoleon. Because Trousson devotes a whole chapter to this subject (in T.P.L.E., pp.421-430), I shall exclude it from the present thesis.

[171] Prometheus (1816) D461, by Franz Schubert, lost.

[172] Prometheus (1819) D674, by Franz Schubert, in Gesänge, by Franz Schubert, Band III, C.F. Peters, Frankfurt, London, New York, pp.213-216

modulations and modes to express the evolution of the poem. There is neither an exposition nor a reexposition of a theme in the poem, a choice which allowed Schubert to reflect as faithfully as could be the rise of Prometheus' words.

In a piano introduction Schubert managed to express at once defiance and nobleness, by combining the major mode, the Allegro tempo, *forte*, and the dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth, which, here, expresses an idea of dynamism and majesty (also emphasised by the octaves on the left hand). However, when Prometheus starts his address to Zeus, Schubert uses the tonality of G minor for the five first verses evoking Zeus in his ethereal realm, a tonality which, associated with the piano nuance, introduces a certain stormy quality. The interlocutor and aim of Prometheus' address is highlighted by the melody, a fifth (G-D) stressing the name "Zeus", the D being held for two and a half beats. This illustrates Schubert's choice of using contrasts in his lieder: from the sixth line, when Prometheus enjoins Zeus to "leave /[His] earth intact", the major mode reappears in the firmness of a recitative. Interestingly, despite the fact that Goethe, in his poem, began another strophe, after "Du mich beneidest", Schubert inscribed in the same movement the first two verses of the second strophe, ("Ich kenne nichts Ärmeres/ Unter der Sonn als euch, Götter !"), two verses in which Prometheus carries on his diatribe against the Olympian gods. It is worth noticing, here, that the composer, again, stressed a climactic and accusative word, "euch", referring to the gods. Schubert did so, again, thanks to a fifth (A-B flat), the B flat having a suspensive quality before the announcement of the accused name: "Götter". After a pause, the following verses of the second strophe take a contrasting mournful aspect to evoke the pathos of the "Poor hopeful fools", the "children and

beggars". The repetition of sixths followed by long descending phrases actually confers a plaintive coloration to those lines. Moreover, the slower tempo, and the harmonic writing of the passage, in the style of a choral, express an almost religious recollection.

This passage contrasts greatly with the following strophe, which deals with Prometheus' evocation of his childhood. Indeed, the tempo is doubled, and Schubert ascribed a lightness to this third strophe thanks to alternating chords between the two hands at the piano, and thanks to tonal mobility. Schubert, again, emphasised the original rhythm of the poem by stressing melodically the words "Ohr"(ear) and "Herz"(heart) with two appogiaturas on E *b*. He thus managed to highlight, in music, Prometheus' sensitivity and humanity as opposed to Zeus' indifference and unfairness. After that strophe, which finished *piano*, a pause prepares the biggest contrast in Schubert's lied.

The piano opens the fourth and most famous passage of Goethe's ode with two chords of the second inversion of a diminished seventh on C sharp, *ff*, Prometheus entering contra-tempo to start a violent ascending recitative. The tension thus starts accumulating. The second interrogation, based on the same harmonic proceeding at the accompaniment, is one tone higher.

The following musical phrase, piano, more melodic, and descending, expresses recollection again. This coincides with the last three lines of the fourth strophe, in which Prometheus expresses regrets about his past obedience to Zeus. However, in the penultimate bar of that phrase, the piano starts a conclusion, *ff*, with a double-dotted quarter note followed by a sixteenth note, a type of rhythm previously associated with

Prometheus. The treatment of those lines, with restraint, allows Schubert to prepare for the climax of the ode. It is interesting to consider why Schubert did not maintain a defiant tone from the fourth strophe to the end of the ode, as could be done in a reading of the poem. The fourth strophe is opened by a steady accompaniment at the piano, *ff*. Prometheus asks the first two questions of that strophe in the same manner, as in the ode, and twice answers them with a slightly descending recitative, ending *pp*. Those two "waves", as we could call them, have the function of announcing the climax of the ode. Indeed, Schubert, like his contemporaries, was obviously deeply touched by verses 42 to 45 of the ode. In order to emphasise their importance, Schubert did not exploit the dotted eighth or double-dotted quarter note followed by a sixteenth note, but chose the greatest rhythmic and melodic stability. The melodic phrase, *ff*, ascends very slowly, with an emphasis on the words "geschmiedet" (omnipotent), thanks to a fourth, on "zeit" (Time), with the same proceeding and interval, and, eventually, on "meine Herrn" (my master). The final pause of the strophe, which intervenes contra tempo, introduces an unexpected emphasis on "und deine" (and yours). Thanks to the melodic line, Schubert highlighted the most important words and ideas of the poem, and imposes an interpretation, a reading of the verses.

After that climax, Schubert did not attempt to maintain such an intensity until the end of the poem. The fifth strophe actually contrasts with the previous one, as if to picture the sad option mentioned by Prometheus

Or did you think perhaps

That I should hate this life,

Flee into deserts

Because not all

The blossoms of dream grew ripe?

The previous steadiness at the piano is broken by an alternance between the two hands, as well as by the *pp*.

The final strophe, opened by the piano, combines different elements previously used by Schubert in order to transcribe Prometheus' triumph. Schubert uses the dynamism of the dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth note, *ff*, with the stability of two quarter notes at the beginning of each bar (as he previously did with the four climactic verses). Schubert also chose the majesty of C Major, a chord fully exploited by Prometheus' singing, which relies strongly on the tonic and the dominant, and which has the characteristics of a march. Such is the spirit Schubert decided to ascribe to Prometheus' presentation and affirmation as a free creator. The composer actually rhythmically stressed the infinitive "freuen sich" (to be glad). However, he also introduced one last contrast in a verse in the minor mode, related to Zeus, and whose realisation could break his freedom: "dein nicht zu achten", which Schubert repeated twice, before finishing on two triumphant chords, *ff*, in a Major key.

This brief analysis, may unable us to delineate the main aspects of Schubert's interpretation of Goethe's poem. Besides the subtle transcription of the various movements of the ode, Schubert, through the musical media, defined, combined and contrasted different moods ascribed to Prometheus and his address to Zeus. Thanks to the use of tonality and to a precise "chiselling" of the melodic line, Schubert also created specific inflexions and stresses. Such preceedings resulted in a proper

"reading", interpretation of the ode in music. This evidence allows us to consider the tremendous impact of the lines 42-45, and of the newly rediscovered Prometheus.

Such a gain in the history of the Prometheus myth would neither be limited to Germany, nor to continental Europe. Goethe's view of Prometheus was at the basis of the Romantic interpretation of the Prometheus myth, and was in the "air du temps". Two giants of English poetry were about to give shape to the myth in an orientation similar to that of Goethe, and that in spite of their irreducible originality.

The Romantic Revolution: Byron and Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley and Lord Byron were all fascinated by the Prometheus myth, and all three writers, in one way or another, dealt with this mythological character. We shall not linger on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, actually subtitled The Modern Prometheus, since the links between her work and the Prometheus myth itself are very loose, and difficult to perceive. If she was inspired by the Prometheus myth and Promethean creation, the expression of this interest is not developed along the same lines as those followed by Byron and Shelley. Indeed, in Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein, like Prometheus, makes a man – or rather fails to make one – and by doing so, he breaks the natural law, which would bring us back to Hesiod, and, to a certain extent, to Æschylus' perspectives. But the motives, means, and nature of Victor and Prometheus are entirely different. Moreover, the main reason why Mary Shelley's character and her friends' interpretations of Prometheus entirely differ rests on the fact that Victor Frankenstein is not a hero. Whereas we can notice a coherence between the work of Byron and Shelley on the

Titan, Mary Shelley's work is not properly centred on him, and her view on the myth remains on the fringe. However, the 1816 Genevan summer the three writers spent together was undoubtedly marked by a common passion for the Titan, and we have to examine the way two great friends and rivals like Shelley and Byron interpreted the same myth. In 1816, Lord Byron wrote a famous three-stanza poem entitled Prometheus, whereas, at the same period, Shelley started to elaborate his Prometheus Unbound. It is difficult to determine who, amongst the trio of writers, originated this interest in the figure of Prometheus. They were certainly stimulated by each other, but it is worth mentioning that, when Byron was at Harrow, Prometheus Bound was one of the plays he had to read three times per year[173]. Byron had actually been familiar with Æschylus' play from an early age. As Peter Thorslev notes, even if Shelley treated Prometheus as a key figure within his philosophical system, "the references to Prometheus in Byron's poetry and in his correspondence before the two poets met in 1816 are legion; the references to Prometheus in Shelley's poetry or letters are practically non existent. When he did refer to him in the notes to the youthful Queen Mab, it was only as the villain who had by the gift of fire first enticed man away from his vegetarian diet (note to Act VIII)"[174]. Byron, in this respect, was certainly the one, within the trio of authors, to transmit his passion for Prometheus, and was the first, in 1816, to publish a work related to Prometheus. There are similarities in Shelley's and Byron's interpretations of the Prometheus myth, and Byron's ode on the Titan is also close to Goethe's, although there is no reason to think that Byron or Shelley knew the

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[173] In Byron's Letters and Journals, 'So late in the night', vol.5, 1816-1817, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, letter to John Murray, Venice, October 12th 1817, John Murray, London, 1976, p.268

[174] In The Byronic Hero, Types and Prototypes, by Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1962, pp. 123-124

work of the German writer at that time[175]. Because Prometheus Unbound was the result of a long maturation, and because it appeared as the accomplished and complex expression of Shelley's philosophy, we shall start our analysis with the study of Byron's Prometheus, which was also the first to be published.

a. "Making death a victory"

"Of the Prometheus of Æschylus I was passionately fond as a boy. [...] The Prometheus – if not exactly in my plan, has always been so much in my head – that I can easily conceive its influence over all or anything that I have written"[176]

Lord Byron

Byron used Prometheus and the Promethean reference several times in his work, but with various aims in mind. A myth, by definition, relies on symbolic thought, which explains why it is bound to evolve, and why it is constantly open to new interpretations. In this respect, it is not surprising to find under the pen of the same writer different uses of the same myth. This is the case for Lord Byron, who used the figure of Prometheus as a metaphor to express his thoughts, and also as a persona. These two applications take, in fact, very different forms. Although both rely on the symbolic aspect of the myth, its use as a metaphor plays on an inflexible pattern,

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[175] See *Goethe en Angleterre*, by J.M. Carré, in Etude de Littérature Comparée. 2ème édition, Paris, 1920, p.78, note I., and the excellent Byron and Goethe, Analysis of a Passion, by E. M. Butler, Bowes and Bowes, London, 1956, especially, concerning Prometheus, pp.191-193, in which we are told that in spite of a mutual admiration, Goethe and Byron, during the writing of their Prometheus, did not know that they were working on the same subject.

[176] In Byron's Letters and Journals, "So late in the night", vol.5, 1816-1817, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, letter to John Murray, Venice, October 12th 1817, John Murray, London, 1976, p.268

whereas the use of Prometheus as character or persona involves an evolution of the myth.

In his Don Juan, Byron associates Prometheus with the theme of love, around the metaphor of the fire of love:

But sweeter still than this, than these, than all

Is first and passionate love[...]

And life yields nothing further to recall

Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown,

No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven

Fire which Prometheus filch'd for us from heaven[177].

In Don Juan[178]again, Lord Byron uses the figure of Prometheus to evoke, this time, physical pain. In Childe Harold, "the ceaseless vultures" represent moral Pain, and in Manfred, Byron bases human dignity on "the mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark, /The lightning of my being"[179]. We can observe that Prometheus was the basis of different concepts for Lord Byron. Even though those evocations of Prometheus and the Promethean fire are interesting inasmuch as they show their power over Byron, we are more concerned with his treatment of Prometheus as a persona in the perspective of the evolution of the myth. However, his poem Prometheus makes such a use of the myth, and is strongly influenced by Æschylus' play.

First of all, if Æschylus influenced Byron, it was through a Romantic reading and interpretation of Prometheus Bound. In actual fact, we must not forget that, at that

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[177] In Lord Byron, The Major Works, ed. by Jerome J.McGann, Don Juan, Canto I, 127, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986, 2000, p.409
[178] *Ibid.*, p.452
[179] *Ibid.*, p.279

time, the translations of Æschylus were often approximate, and that the existence of the Prometheus trilogy was unknown[180]. The conception English poets had of Æschylus during that period was probably not very different from that of Victor Hugo, who saw in him a Greek Shakespeare, knowing that the Shakespeare himself was perceived as a Romantic playwright. We have to be very mindful of these aspects when we examine Romantic texts which claim to be the heirs of Æschylus' Prometheus Bound. Byron has probably been more influenced by a Romantic idea of Æschylus than by the authentic value of Prometheus Bound. The second reason why Byron's Prometheus cannot appear as a banal rewriting of Prometheus Bound comes from his very personal conception of Prometheus' nature. We have to bear in mind those two characteristics in our reading of Prometheus.

The first strophe of Byron's Prometheus emphasises the link existing between Æschylus' Prometheus and his own. The way Byron evokes the suffering of the Titan reflects Æschylus' pathetic depiction of Prometheus bound to his rock. However, the means the two poets use to create such a feeling diverge. Whereas Æschylus based this pathos on a "lamento" produced by Greek rhythms, and, of course, on the visual intensity of drama, Byron renders pathos through a succession of iambic and binary rhythms which produce an effect of hypotyposis. This trope has the particularity of giving a pictorial quality to poetry, by creating an impression of coincidence between what is depicted and the means of depiction. The effect of this hypotyposis is strengthened by the fact that it follows the inaugural address to Prometheus, which takes the form of a fluent eulogy:

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[180] Concerning Æschylus' trilogy, its structure and implications on the perception of Prometheus Bound, see I, 1, b., "Prometheus the rebel"

Titan! To whose immortal eyes[181]

The sufferings of mortality, seen in their sad reality,

Were not as things that gods despise;

What was thy pity's recompense?

The hypotyposis which follows therefore contrasts with the previous lines:

A silent suffering, and intense; (line 5)

The rock, the vulture, and the chain,

All that the proud can feel of pain, The agony they do not show,

The suffocating sense of woe, (line 8)

Which speaks but in its loneliness, And then is jealous lest the sky

Should have a listener, nor will sigh until its voice is echoless.

The skilled play on rhythms (with an acceleration of rhythm line 6, followed by a continuous amplification which maintains the "phrasing" until the end of the strophe) truly conjures up the pathetic image of Prometheus on his rock, reproducing Prometheus' suffocation under the pain. We can also notice in this first strophe that unlike Goethe's conception of Prometheus, in the opening of the poem, the Titan is represented as superior to man. Although he appears as their benefactor, he is not part of mankind. In this respect, we could say that Byron appears as the heir of Æschylus. Moreover, to reinforce this idea, the seventh line, in which Prometheus is called "the proud", introduces the notion of hubris, characteristic of Greek tragedies.

However, from the second strophe, Byron's poem departs from of his source of inspiration. In actual fact, the gods are depicted as fundamentally unfair and evil:

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[181] Poem extracted from Lord Byron, selected Poetry, ed. by Jerome McGann, Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, p.64

Titan! To thee the strife was given

Between the suffering and the will,

Which torture where they cannot kill; (line 13)

And the inexorable Heaven,

And the deaf tyranny of Fate,

The ruling principle of Hate,

Which for its pleasure doth create

The things it may annihilate,

Refused thee even the boon to die:

Such an "impious" conception of the Olympic gods could rely on the Romantic bias and peculiar reading of Æschylus mentioned above. However, it is probably at this stage that Lord Byron's originality concerning Prometheus' figure clearly intervenes. A first element shows that Byron departs from the Greek in lines 14 to 16 quoted above. Indeed, they make Prometheus' hubris impossible, since injustice is presented as the main attribute of the gods. It implies that Prometheus' transgression obeys a superior order, as opposed to the gods' gratuitous acts. The following lines of the strophe appear as a narration of the original myth : Prometheus' immortality is evoked, a traditional depiction of Zeus is sketched ("the Thunderer", line 21, in whose "hand the lightings tremble", line 27), and Lord Byron, line 24, comes back to the etymology of Prometheus' name ("foresight"), to play on it. Even the theme of the secret, about the fatal offspring Thetis and Zeus could have, is present in the second strophe of the poem ("The fate thou didst so well foresee/ But would not to appease him tell;/ And thy silence was his sentence," lines 24-26). But in spite of the

"traditional" aspect of the mythological material of this part of the second strophe, lines 14, 15, and 16 ensure that Prometheus is rendered heroic in the third strophe, a characteristic which establishes Lord Byron's originality in his interpretation of the Prometheus myth.

In actual fact, after the use of those narrative elements, the third and last strophe appears as an analysis of Prometheus' acts, following a very clear and logical structure within the poem. Following the denunciation of the gods' injustice, this analysis takes a particular significance, far from being fortuitous. It takes the features of a retrial of Prometheus' infamy, and entails even more than his discharge:

Thy Godlike crime was to be kind, (line 35)

To render with thy precepts less

The sum of human wretchedness,

And strengthen Man with his own mind;

We can first notice that the theft of fire is absent here. Prometheus' main gift to mankind, as in Goethe's works, is the awakening of conscience. This modification therefore appears as something established at this stage of the myth's history. Secondly, the verdict which is given here is very far from the one returned by Æschylus in Prometheus Bound, and probably still further from the one he gave in his Promethean trilogy. Indeed, even though Prometheus' intentions towards mankind are good, the Titan is nonetheless guilty of hubris: his means are good, but the end of his acts, which, according to Æschylus, would eventually be his own good, is a violation of the rules of gods. World order and harmony combined with justice still rely on the gods. In order to come back to the original balance, Prometheus' crime has to be

punished. The focus of Lord Byron's Prometheus is very different concerning this aspect. Prometheus no longer appears as a transgressor, which means that he is not a faulty link in the chain the world order represents. In Lord Byron's thought, Prometheus himself embodies another world, with its own values. A world whose purpose is to outstrip that of the Olympian gods. In this context, the adjective "Godlike" is particularly enlightening: those who bear the name of gods are degenerated as such, if we consider the enumeration of their attributes in the second strophe of the poem. Because Prometheus represents what overthrows this set of values, he appears as a legitimate god, would he make this claim. The rest of the poem is also enlightening, if we consider the value the word "Spirit" takes:

But baffled as thou wert from high,(line 39)

Still in thy patient energy,

In the endurance and repulse

Of thine impenetrable Spirit, Which Earth and Heaven could not convulse,

A Mighty lesson we inherit;

Byron, in this context, emphasises the fact that Prometheus is the representative of a divine principle. The noun "Spirit" with the capital letter is used by Byron to conjure up Christian images (especially with the contiguity of the word "impenetrable", line 35), and certainly more particularly the image of Jesus Christ:

Thou art a symbol and a sign (line 45)

To mortals of their fate and force;

Like thee, Man is in part divine,

A troubled stream from a pure source; (line 48)

And Man in portions can foresee

His own funereal destiny;

His wretchedness, and his resistance,

And his sad unallied existence:

Prometheus is here identified in his nature with Jesus Christ, and especially in lines 39 and 40. With this parallel, Byron is representative of one of the major Romantic interpretations of Prometheus. Indeed, Romanticism truly established the parallel between the Titan and Jesus Christ so dear to the critics' hearts. With Byron, this identification is moored in the fact that Prometheus, like Jesus Christ, is not deprived of his divine origins, but is also a man. Here, as in Gœthe's works, Prometheus' love for men leads him to become part of mankind. Line 37 is particularly interesting: it appears as a climax in the poem, and defines the value of Prometheus' figure. As "a symbol and a sign" of their "fate and force", Prometheus represents the essence of mankind according to Byron.

In actual fact, this identification between Prometheus and them is mainly based on the fact that both have a dual nature. We have already shown that Prometheus, in his opposition to gods and their attributes, is eventually associated with mankind. Vice versa, man is subjected to mortality, unlike Prometheus, but he is partly divine thanks to his conscience and soul:

To which his Spirit may oppose (line 53)

Itself – an equal to all woes,

And a firm will, and a deep sense,

The spiritual qualities with which Byron endows mankind appear as properly divine. In this respect, the final lines, under the form of an apotheosis, are particularly interesting, with Byron operating a fusion between men and their symbol, Prometheus.

Which even in torture can descry (line 56)

Its own concentrated recompense,

Triumphant where it dares defy,

And making death a Victory.

In actual fact, it is not only a question of the specificity of men of power facing their destiny. Prometheus' agonies and suffering are conjured up one last time, although they are not named as such, to symbolise the particular fight of mankind. However, such a fusion within a symbol has a deep effect: Prometheus does not eventually appear as a god or a prefiguration of Jesus Christ, but, because he transmits his force to men, as a hero, to whom the crown of laurels is given in the last line. Besides the deep identification links existing between Byron's Prometheus and men, his most important function in the poem is to be an example of perseverance and strength for men. If we take this point into consideration, we cannot allege, with Trousson, that Byron's Prometheus is just a traditional rewriting of the Prometheus myth. The figure of the Titan allows him to personify his conception of the Romantic hero, as a positive figure freed from sin which entirely departs from the tragic hero. Our aim is not to discuss the famous and almost systematic identification of Byron with the heroes he created (and in particular with Childe Harold). It is nonetheless particularly fruitful to notice that in a passage of The Prophecy of Dante (1821), a poem written

five years after Prometheus, Byron used the figure of the Titan once again to embody a great genius endowed with all the Romantic traits. Misunderstood, solitude is his fate:

Many are poets but without the name

For what is poetry but to create

From overfeeling good or ill; and aim

At an eternal life beyond our fate,

And be the new Prometheus of new men,

Bestowing fire from heaven, and then, too late,

Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain,

And vultures to the heart of the bestower,

Who, having lavish'd his high gift in vain,

Lies chain'd to his lone rock by the sea-shore[182]

Prometheus' heroism is based on a superb Romantic pride, which is at the opposite pole to the Greek hubris. Whereas in Prometheus Bound, the Titan, in spite of being the patron and benefactor of mankind – because of his hubris – is invariably the transgressor of the world order, Byron's Prometheus is great precisely because of his immoderation.

It is interesting to see that in the Romantic set of values, Prometheus, freed from his sin, and his rebellious side combined with his creative talents, becomes the ideal figure to identify with. According to Peter Thorslev, Prometheus is "certainly the most sublime of all the Romantic heroes, and at the same time the most refined. Since he is

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[182] In Lord Byron, The Complete Poetical Works, ed. by Jerome McGann, vol. 4, The Prophecy of Dante, canto IV, l.10-19, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986-1992, p.234

the Romantic Hero apotheosised, he is pure allegory; there is nothing in him of the Gothic, nothing of the dark mystery or taint of sin of the other Romantic heroes.[...] Although Prometheus lends 'Promethean' characteristics to all the rest of these heroes, he borrows nothing from them."[183] Prometheus is different from the English "gothic" Romantic type Peter Thorslev is referring to inasmuch as he is presented by Byron as a pure rebel, and, to a certain extent, as a pure spirit, and a pure will. It is in this sense that Byron sees Prometheus as "pure allegory", which has to be understood as an archetype.

The figure of Prometheus appealed greatly to Romantic poets. Although Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe strongly denied being a Romantic author, and is considered as a second-generation classicist by German scholars, there was an undeniable community of thought between Goethe and Byron, and other great Romantic artists. Thorslev suggests that Byron's Prometheus' "last line, curiously enough, echoes the very sentiment of the close of Goethe's fragment, although there could of course be no question of influence."[184] The influence which was really at stake here was certainly that of the figure of Prometheus himself, who, within the history of the myth, had gradually gained a new significance. There is nonetheless an important distinction that we have to make between Byron's and Goethe's Prometheus: in Goethe's works, Prometheus does not suffer the terrible punishment he has to endure in the ancient versions of the myth, and in Byron's. This difference has to be borne in mind, since it will leave its stamp on German interpretations of the Prometheus myth, and notably in

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[183] In The Byronic Hero, Types and Prototypes, by Peter L. Thorslev Jr., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1962, pp. 112-113
[184] *Ibid.*, p.122

the pictorial field. In Percy Bysshe Shelley's Prometheus Unbound as well as in Byron's Prometheus, the punishment of the Titan is essential. Whereas in Byron's poem Prometheus appears as a very refined embodiment of the Byronic hero, in Prometheus Unbound, he becomes the keystone of Shelley's poetical and philosophical edifice.

b. Prometheus at the Heart of Shelley's Cosmogony

"Genuine creation, or poetry, creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our mind by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration"

P.B. Shelley, The Defence of Poetry

In Este, in September 1818, Percy Byshhe Shelley started drafting Prometheus Unbound. After a six-month hiatus during which he worked on The Cenci, Shelley wrote the fourth Act of Prometheus Unbound together with a few "lyrical insertions" for the first three acts. As Donald H.Reiman and Sharon B. Powers note, "though he had first sent Prometheus Unbound to be published in England in its three-act original version, Shelley's late additions broadened the scope of his most ambitious work from a myth of the renovation of the human psyche to a renewing of the whole cosmos."[185] In actual fact, Prometheus Unbound appears as a dense and elaborate lyrical drama, and also as the perfect example of a total appropriation of the myth through the means of poetry. Mary Shelley herself observed in her note on Prometheus Unbound, that "the prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was,

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[185] In Shelley's Poetry and Prose, selected and ed. by Donald H Reiman,. and Sharon B. Powers, Norton and Company, New York, London, 1977, p.130

that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled [...] That man could be so perfectionised as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system. And the subject he loved best to dwell on, was the image of One warring with the evil principle, oppressed not only by it, but by all, even the good, who were deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity."[186] It is worth noticing that Shelley's model as described by his wife is very close to the definition we previously gave of the Promethean man, and we shall have to examine what led Shelley to glorify this type. As a Romantic writer living at a time when established beliefs, values, political and social structures were challenged and threatened, Shelley admired Prometheus' character both as hero, revolutionary and freedom fighter, but also, and above all, as a creator. This latter role takes an even more radical significance than in Goethe's works, in which this aspect was already essential.

Shelley's dénouement, in this respect, is meaningful: purified by his suffering, strengthened by a form of heroism that sublimates pain, Shelley's Prometheus, according to Jacqueline Duchemin[187], did not want his deliverance to be gained through reconciliation. His release is also bound to the inevitable collapse of a cruel god, who is both the principle and symbol of evil. Persevering until the end in his resistance to Zeus, Prometheus did not disclose the secret with which he threatened Zeus in Æschylus' play, so that the master of the world carried out his lethal plan of becoming Thetis' lover. This is how Demogorgon was born, Demogorgon who, according to the oracle, would be greater than his father and would overthrow this

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186 In The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed by Mrs Shelley, Edward Moxon, 1839, II, pp.133-134
187 In P.H.M., p.132

latter. It is only after Zeus' collapse that Prometheus is delivered by Hercules. This liberation marks the beginning of an era of peace and freedom, a proper golden age for mankind, inasmuch as a recreation of the world is implied by the destruction of Zeus' world order. It is worth noticing, with Maurice Hindle, that "Byron had a less idealistic view of the human possibilities suggested by Prometheus than did Shelley.[...]Byron could never have been so idealistic as to believe that evil can be eradicated from the world by willpower and mental determination. But Shelley, with what Mary called his 'more abstract and etherealised inspiration', was sustained by a strong idealism and faith in men".[188] We have to bear in mind that Prometheus Unbound was not, for Shelley, an attempt to restore the lost drama of Æschylus, and that, in spite of the title of the play and his deep admiration for the Greek playwright.[189] The poet mentions, in his preface to the play, that it would have been "an ambition, which, if [his] preference to this mode of treating the subject had incited [him] to cherish, the recollection of a high comparison such an attempt would challenge, might well abate. But in truth [he] was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the oppressor of mankind",[190] a conclusion which had surely been adopted by Æschylus in his trilogy, given the character of Zeus in his other plays. Indeed, one of the most apparent and important aspects of Prometheus Unbound, which has a decisive impact on further developments of the Prometheus myth, is the fact that Prometheus' struggle implies a new conception of the world order.

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[188] In Frankenstein, by Maurice Hindle, Penguin Critical Studies, London, 1994, p.135
[189] This admiration was certainly transmitted to Shelley by Lord Byron, who had an intimate knowledge of Prometheus Bound.
[190] In Shelley's Poetry and Prose, selected and edited by Donald H. Reiman, and Sharon B. Powers, Norton and Company, New York, London, 1977, p.133

Regarding this crucial aspect, it is certainly worth starting from and lingering over Thorslev's theories on Prometheus and the different world orders at stake in Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound. In actual fact, Thorslev puts forward the idea that the Prometheus myth "tends in its Romantic development toward a vision of a naturalistic universe coloured by a humanist faith".[191] Although it is difficult to build theories on Prometheus Bound, knowing that it is part of a larger structure, a trilogy, which was lost, Thorslev distinguishes three levels in Æschylus' play: "the Promethean level, a realm of humanist values, since Prometheus is the patron and guide of man, and his gifts are the things man values, [...] the realm in which Zeus reigns: a vindictive and cruel order, irrational and capricious, at least in the terms of the play.[...] Finally, there is the order of Fate to which Prometheus appeals in his soliloquy, and which is obviously conceived as being above both Prometheus and Jove." However, it is difficult to fully agree with Thorslev on the distinction of three levels in a Greek tragedy like Prometheus Bound. In actual fact, we have to bear in mind that the Greek world order is definitely one. It is indeed ultimately governed by a superior power, Fate or Moira, but Zeus is part of this order, in that he ensures its stability. Prometheus, in this context, appears as a transgressor of this world order, but it does not necessarily mean that he represents another realm. He actually destroys the balance of the world order, but as one of the elements of this world. Peter Thorslev carries on his analysis by saying that "the order in Shelley's

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191 Peter Thorslev explains that "by a naturalistic universe [he]mean[s] an amoral universe, one which is morally indifferent but which is nevertheless ordered, but ordered so that what is strong is also successful; in other words, [...] the universe as it is generally presented to us by the evidence of modern science. By a humanist faith, [he] mean[s] the belief that the heart or the soul of man is so constituted that given the conditioning of a moral and reasonable environment, and given a normal hereditary endowment, he will most of the time choose the good.", in The Byronic Hero, Types and Prototypes, by Peter L. Thorslev Jr., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1962, p.117

Promethean universe is also on three levels, since as the play opens, we have Prometheus, who stands for humanist values (although admittedly with the significant addition of the quality of mercy which is absent in both Æschylus and Goethe); Jupiter or Jove, who is capricious and cruel as in the two previous dramas; and finally, "Demogorgon's mighty law" to which all spirits are apparently subject." It is true that the levels we could perceive in Prometheus Unbound are of a different nature than those in Prometheus Bound, and they allow us to take all the measure of the turn the Prometheus myth took in the nineteenth century. However, we would rather distinguish two antagonistic world orders, and not three levels here. In actual fact, it appears in Prometheus Bound that Zeus' power together with the order he represents are the mental creation of man. Northrop Frye's explanations about the particular trait of the human mind Shelley develops in Prometheus Unbound are very enlightening: "Man is a myth-making as well as a tool-using animal, but constant vigilance is needed to make sure that he keeps control of what he makes, for it is with myths as it is with technology: just as man invents the wheel and then talks about a wheel of fate or fortune overriding everything he does, so he creates gods and then announces that the gods have created him. He makes his own creation, in short, a power to stop himself from creating".[192] Effectively, Shelley assumed that Zeus was nothing but a mental projection, which meant that the human race would avoid improving itself. When the moment of Zeus' fall comes, he becomes identical to his phantasm. When Prometheus addresses the phantasm, in the first act of Prometheus Bound, he notices:

Tremendous Image! As thou art must be

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192 In A Study of English Romanticism, by Northrop Frye, The Harvester Press Limited, New York, 1968, p.88

He whom thou shadowest forth. [...][193]

Nonetheless, even if the image of a personal god such as Zeus is the product of man's mind, it is real and oppressive. In this respect, Prometheus Unbound would be the account of man's liberation from this burden. To a certain extent, the collapse of Zeus would therefore represent the burial of old myths, whereas Prometheus' freedom would be the expression of the myth-making power of man. As Northrop Frye puts it, "Prometheus is now the human mind confronting the objective world with its own desire, and Jupiter is the mental block which prevents man from trying to conceive and reshape a world beyond that order."[194] The real nature of Zeus, that is a mental image created by man, is unveiled when he disappears:

Let hell unlock

Its mounded oceans of tempestuous fire,

And whelm on them into the bottomless void

The desolated world, and thee, and me

The conqueror and the conquered, and the wreck

Of that for which they combated[195]

Prometheus Unbound appears as the account of a new creation of the world, underlain by the consciousness man gained of his myth-making power. The poem, in this respect, would also be the expression of this quest and conquest. In the first act of the play the fourth spirit already mentions the force of mythopoetic powers:

On a Poet's lips I slept

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193 In Shelley's Poetry and Prose, ed. by Donald H. Reinman and Sharon B. Powers, Norton and Company, New York, London, 1977, p. 143

194 In A Study of English Romanticism, by Northrop Frye, the Harvester Press limited, 1968, p.95

195 In Shelley's Poetry and Prose, ed. by Donald H. Reinman and Sharon B. Powers, Norton and Company, New York, London, 1977, p.182

Dreaming like a love-adept

In the sound his breathing kept;[...]

He will watch from dawn to gloom

The lake-reflected sun illume

The yellow bees I' the ivy-bloom

Nor heed nor see, what things they be;

But from these create he can

Forms more real than living man,

Nurslings of immortality!-[196]

Those beautiful lines, at the beginning of the play, appear as an announcement of the recreation of the world to come. When the ancient world order is eventually overthrown by Prometheus, we attend the accomplishment of these powers through the realisation of a new cosmogony in the fourth act:

VOICE OF UNSEEN SPIRITS

Bright clouds float in heaven,

Dew-stars gleam on Earth,

Waves assemble on Ocean,

They are gathered and driven

By the storm of delight, by the panic of glee!

The entire fourth act is an evocation of this cosmogony, in which music is omnipresent. An interesting aspect of this recreation of a world order is that it entails an eternal suspension of time and therefore a rejection of history, whereas a latent ideal world arises:

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[196] *Ibid.*, p.157

Spectres we

Of the dead hours be,

We bear Time to his tomb in eternity.[197]

The conception of such an ideal world, in which the notion of time does not exist is certainly to be put on the account of Shelley's avid reading of Plato. Indeed, the Greek philosopher's conception of a fore-world, governed by an Absolute named "One", which is also central in Shelley's play, certainly gave the poet the foundations to build his own idealism.[198] This absolute principle seems close, once again, to the Greek "Moira", except that when fully accomplished, the notion of time does not apply to this principle, whereas the Greek fate seems inevitably bound to it. It seems also relevant that the king of the new ideal realm Shelley creates is neither Demogorgon or Prometheus, but man:

CHORUS OF SPIRITS

And our singing shall build,

In the Void's loose field,

A world for the spirit of Wisdom to wield;

We will take our plan

From the new world of man

And our work shall be called the Promethean.[199]

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[197] *Ibid.*, p.194

[198] In his preface to Prometheus Unbound, Shelley mentions his reference: "I have, what a Scotch philosopher characteristically terms, 'a passion for reforming the world': what passion incited him to write and publish his book, he omits to explain. For my part I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to heaven with Paley and Malthus".

[199] In Shelley's Poetry and Prose, ed. by Donald H. Reinman and Sharon B. Powers, Norton and Company, New York, London, 1977, p.198

The attribution of this realm to men raises the problem of religion in Prometheus Unbound. In a nineteenth century context, Prometheus' triumph over Jupiter in Shelley's play would have been read as a victory over a religion associated with an oppressive Christianity. In actual fact, the figure of Jesus Christ is evoked several times in Prometheus Unbound, and is clearly affiliated to that of Prometheus himself. However, we have to be cautious and note that Christianity is not entirely rejected, since the Christlike figure emerges in the poem as an emblem of a magnificent hope, but a hope which was deceived: the Church is enable to put an end to the sufferings of mankind:

One came forth, of gentle worth,

Smiling on the sanguine earth;

His words outlived him, like swift poison

Withering up truth, peace, and pity.[...]

Hark that outcry of despair!

'Tis his mild and gentle ghost

Wailing for the faith he kindled.[200]

We notice here that despite Jesus Christ's failure in his mission, similarities exist between him and the Titan. Because of the intensity of his suffering, because of his total devotion to men, and, most importantly, because of biblical references throwing bridges between Prometheus and Jesus Christ, the mythological character, in Prometheus Unbound, appears as a sublime incarnation of man. The allusions to the passion on Golgotha and to the crucifixion, quoted above, play an important part in

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[200] *Ibid.*, p.152

Prometheus Unbound. This parallel allowed Shelley to lend weight to the depiction of the Titan as a fighter for freedom and revolutionary character, inasmuch as it enlightened the human side of Prometheus' persona. If we were to make a synthesis of Prometheus' features in Shelley's play, as opposed to his counterpart in Prometheus Bound, he appears as a victim devoid of resentment, and one whose creative power is crucial to elaborate Shelley's ideal world. Shelley's main innovation, concerning the perception of Prometheus' persona, lies in the fact that he combined two aspects of the Titan's persona which were previously separated: his search for freedom, and his love for mankind.

However, even if the Christian model, or anti-model, is apparent in Prometheus Unbound, another influence is undeniable: the restoration of many of the elements of Pre-Christian Greek culture. In a draft of The Defence of Poetry, Shelley says of the century preceding the death of Socrates: "It is as if the continent of Paradise were overwhelmed and some shattered crag remained covered with asphodel and amaranth which bear golden flowers." Indeed, Greek culture and religion, according to Shelley, were less oppressive in imposing belief. According to Northrop Frye, it also "preserved the intuitive sense of identity with natural forces; its polytheism enabled the scientific and philosophical views of the world to develop independently".[201]

Prometheus Unbound would then be an account of the recovery of this "identity with natural forces" and it would explain why the recreation of the world is the only possible conclusion of the play. With Shelley, we therefore reach a paradox within the myth, inasmuch as Prometheus, no longer responsible for the loss of the golden age, is

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201 In A Study of English Romanticism, by Northrop Frye, The Harvester Press Limited, New York, 1968, p.100

on the contrary the hero who conquers it, an element which paves the way for Symbolism. At this stage in the evolution of the Prometheus myth, the humanisation of the Titan seems to appear as a fact, and we shall now see that it is not only true of Germany and England. Beyond the irreducible particularities of style, imagery, and thought, we discern a coherence in the treatment of the Prometheus myth across Europe, and the work of Victor Hugo, Franz Liszt and Honoré de Balzac testify to it.

2. *The Mask of the Artist: Victor Hugo, Franz Liszt and Honoré de Balzac*

Although the turning point in the interpretation of the myth appears under its most striking form in Germany, with Goethe, and in England, with Shelley and Byron, some of the most famous artists of the first half of the nineteenth century in France found in the Prometheus figure a perfect image to express their ideals and/or fears. They took hold of Prometheus so well that the Titan became – whether it was intentional or not – an artistic model to identify with. Different features of Prometheus as a symbol or as a myth appealed to them, and although different, there are probably no better examples of this new "cult" devoted to Prometheus than his treatment by Hugo and Balzac in literature, and Franz Liszt in music.

a. Titanic Hugo

Victor Hugo conjured up the figure of Prometheus several times in his poetry, and at various periods of his life. However, although we might find here and there possible allusions to the Titan in his poetry, only five times did Hugo clearly evoke

Prometheus: in "Le Génie"[202] ("The Genius"), in " La Vision des montagnes"[203] ("The Vision of the Mountains"), in " Le couchant flamboyait à travers les bruines"[204] ("The Setting Sun was Blazing through the Drizzles"), in "La fin de Satan"[205] ("The End of Satan") and in his preface to Burgraves. This is why it is interesting to notice that, in spite of the relatively few occurrences – considering Hugo's monumental output – we find of Prometheus in Hugo's poetry, other poets perceived a close link between Prometheus and Victor Hugo. I will return to that point later. Before examining why such a gap might exist between the perception of the importance of Prometheus in Hugo's work and his actual representation, I will consider the significance of Prometheus in the poems mentioned above.[206] Given that these poems have not yet been translated into English, a literal translation will be provided when necessary.

I will not analyse the poem extracted from La Fin de satan here, inasmuch as Trousson quotes it and analyses it in his work.[207] Moreover, the interpretation of Prometheus in this poem is not necessarily along the line of Hugo's other interpretations of the Titan, since he represents him as the harbinger of progress and sciences, as the awakener of human self-awareness. Amongst Hugo's poems on the theme of Prometheus, "Le Génie" is the most important for understanding the

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[202] In Odes et Ballades, IV, 6, by Victor Hugo, ed. by Pierre Albouy, Poésies Gallimard, Paris, 1964, pp. 220-224

[203] In Toute la lyre, vol. I, I, 1, by Victor Hugo, Nelson, Paris, 1916, pp.19-21

[204] In *Le Moi*, IX. Toute la lyre, by Victor Hugo, Nelson, Paris, 1916, pp.29-30

[205] In *La Fin de Satan. Dieu*, IV : *Le Vautour*, Oeuvres poétiques complètes, ed. by Francis Bouvet, Paris, Pauvert, 1961, pp.1228-1229

[206] I shall not examine the preface of Burgraves, inasmuch as "La Vision des montagnes" uses almost word for word, thirteen years later (the preface is dated from 25th March 1843 and the poem from 2nd July 1856), the passage concerning Prometheus: "[Le Voyageur] n'apercevait pas à l'horizon l'immense Prométhée couché comme une montagne sur une montagne..." / "[The traveller] could not perceive on the horizon the great Prometheus, lying down as a mountain on top of another one". I will also exclude two poems, "le Retour de l'Empereur" and "L'Expiation", in which Hugo identifies Napoleon with the Titan. On this particular treatment of the myth, see supra, p.87, note 170.

[207] In T.P.L.E., pp. 456-457.

meaning of the Titanic figure for Hugo. Indeed, "Le Génie" is dedicated to François-René de Chateaubriand, and appears as a tribute to his genius, since he represented the accomplished artist for young Victor Hugo[208] (the poem was composed in 1820). Moreover, Chateaubriand seemed to embody the perfect literary model for Hugo, at a time when he was a young royalist, an "ultra" whose catholic faith was very strong. In this respect, it is not surprising to notice that the poem bears in epigraph a quotation from La Mennais, a famous politician of the time who stood for all the values and beliefs Hugo had faith in. It is worth mentioning this epigraph, which sets the tone of the poem:

The circumstances do not shape men, they show them: they reveal, so to say, the kingship of genius and last resource of extinct peoples. These kings who do not bear that name, but who truly reign by strength of character and greatness of thoughts, are elected by the events they have to command to. Without ancestors and posterity, unique in their race, they disappear once their mission fulfilled, leaving to future the orders it will faithfully execute.[209]

The first element that can be drawn from this extract, in this context, is the fact that this definition of the genius was certainly meant to apply to Chateaubriand, although we can also perceive the echo it might have had, after the "*Sturm und Drang*" movement and the importance the term "genius" had taken, to designate the power of individual creation and inner forms. If we also consider the importance of Victor Hugo's ethos as a poet, soon to be apparent in "Le Génie", we can assume that the use

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[208] For a biography of Victor Hugo, refer to Victor Hugo, by Graham Robb, W.W. Norton Company, New York, 1997

[209] In Odes et Ballades, by Victor Hugo, IV, 6, by Victor Hugo, ed. by Pierre Albouy, Poésies Gallimard, Paris, 1964, p.220

of the term "genius" is also meant to apply to Victor Hugo. We need to bear that in mind, especially when dealing with the links perceived between Prometheus and Victor Hugo. The second major element of this epigraph is the expression of a very strong and almost religious faith in man, which is an important aspect in relation to the Prometheus myth.

Indeed, the first strophe of the poem contains the precise evocation of the Titan:

Malheur à l'enfant de la terre,	*Woe betide the child of earth*
Qui, dans ce monde injuste et vain,	*Who, in this vain and unfair world,*
Porte en son âme solitaire	*Bears in his solitary soul*
Un rayon de l'Esprit divin!	*A beam of the divine Spirit!*
Malheur à lui ! L'impure envie	*Woe betide him! The impure envy*
S'acharne sur sa noble vie,	*Dogs his noble life,*
Semblable au Vautour éternel,	*Alike the eternal Vulture,*
Et, de son triomphe irritée,	*And, by his triumph irritated,*
Punit ce nouveau Prométhée	*Punishes this new Prometheus*
D'avoir ravi le feu du ciel.	*For the theft of Heavenly fire*[210]

We can observe that the first strophe presents a similarity with the third strophe of Byron's ode, in which the double nature of man, both animal and spiritual, is also mentioned. However, whereas in Byron's poem, man transcends the "trouble stream" of his nature to eventually triumph, in spite of, or, should we rather say, thanks to his double nature, in Victor Hugo's "Le Génie", "the impure envy" of man, that is to say

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[210] My translation

his animal aspect, is presented as the punishment itself. In the poems we previously examined, the oppressive element within the Prometheus myth was always embodied by a divine transcendence. But we are now confronted with the interesting idea that the Promethean fight is a human internal conflict, between man's spiritual and carnal sides. Here again, the "heavenly fire" is a metaphor for Spirit, that is genius, which is represented as the main attribute of gods, stolen by man, "the child of earth" and "new Prometheus". The Titan is thus indirectly mentioned, used as a symbol: man is actually punished for his theft, as Prometheus was before him. However, from the second strophe, the nature of the tormentor changes:

La gloire, fantôme céleste, *Glory, celestial ghost,*

Apparaît de loin à ses yeux; *Appears from afar before his eyes ;*

Il subit le pouvoir funeste de son rire impérieux ! He undergoes the fateful power of

[his imperious laugh !

Ainsi l'oiseau, faible et timide, *And the bird, weak and shy,*

Veut en vain fuir l'hydre perfide *Wants to escape the perfidious hydra*

Dont l'œil le charme et le poursuit ; *Whose eye charms and pursues him ;*

Il voltige de cime en cime, *He flutters about from peak to peak*

Puis il accourt, et meurt victime *Then he rushes up, and dies,*

Du doux regard qui l'a séduit. *Victim of the sweet look that seduced*

[him.

"The impure envy" does not appear as the punishment of the "new Prometheus" anymore. The chimera of glory follows it, and, very unexpectedly, the symbol of the "new Prometheus" is replaced by the image of a bird! Although the bird in question is

an albatross,[211] and not the vulture of the Prometheus myth, such a choice, following the first strophe, seems rather confusing. Moreover, in the third strophe, although the metaphor of the bird is long-drawn-out, it is associated to the noun "the immortal", linked to Prometheus; both images are surprisingly combined. The bird, more than mankind, seems to represent the figure of the artist: in actual fact, with his laurel, he is confronted to "mistake, lofty ignorance/ unpunished offence and hatred", that is to say to other men, and not to the illusion of glory. The myth of Prometheus is still used in the rest of the poem, but in a more allusive way. The second part of the poem actually makes the link between the bird-artist and Chateaubriand, who "accepts his genius", because he feels "in his soul/ the celestial flame rising", whereas in the second strophe of the second part of "Le Génie", Hugo evokes one more time his literary idol, who "Received from the sky this fateful gift/ which hurts our jealous pride". In this, Hugo chooses Prometheus as a symbol again, but by taking Chateaubriand as a model and by presenting himself in the poem, he uses Prometheus to a wider extent as the figure of the artist, which shall be fraught with consequences. The third and last part of the poem is mainly devoted to the exile of Chateaubriand during the French Revolution, and to the exaltation of the religious and political thoughts young Hugo and Chateaubriand had in common. The conclusive strophe develops the symbol of the albatross and not that of Prometheus. Freed from "envy, bound to perverts", the bird flies up, and, "far from the noises of Earth,/ lolled by his solitary flight,/ will fall asleep in heaven".[212]

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[211] There is a poetical tradition in France which tends to use the albatross as a symbol of the poet. The most famous poem making use of it is that of Baudelaire, entitled *L'Albatros.*

[212] In his notes to the 1820 edition, Victor Hugo mentions that the albatross sleeps while flying.

Although the Prometheus myth, in "Le Génie", is not the central element of the poem, used as it is as a symbol and combined with another one, it is nonetheless interesting to notice that the Titan is associated with the figure of the artist of genius.

The myth is used in a similar way by Hugo, in the 1850s, in his poem "Le couchant flamboyait à travers les bruines".[213] It does not bear any precise date, but the power of the ocean being omnipresent in the poem, we can legitimately assume that it was composed in Jersey, at the beginning of Hugo's exile following Napoleon III's coup. In actual fact, the contemplation of the ocean by the outlaw artist was an important pattern of Hugo's poetry during this decisive period of his life. The figure of the outlaw in Hugo's poetry and drawings is central, and it is worth noticing that in the poetical field as well as in the pictorial, Hugo almost always depicted this figure on a rock, facing the ocean, which also conjures up our imaginary representation of Prometheus. It is precisely after an inaugural atmospheric description of the ocean that the Titan is evoked in "Le couchant flamboyait à travers les bruines":

Lugubre immensité! profondeurs redoutées!	*Dismal infinity! feared depths! (line 13)*
Tous sont là, les Satans comme les Prométhées,	*All are there, Satans as well as Prometheuses,*
Ténébreux océans!	*Gloomy oceans!*
Cieux, vous êtes l'abîme où tombent les génies,	*Heaven, you are the abyss in which geniuses fall,*
Oh ! combien l'œil au fond des brumes infinies	*Oh ! how numerous at the bottom of infinite mists*
Aperçoit de géants !	*The giants the eye catches sight of!*[214]

As in "Le Génie", the genius is again associated with the figure of Prometheus. However, the Titan is in this context part of an ensemble of outlaws, which also

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[213] In Toute la lyre, by Victor Hugo, Nelson, Paris, 1916, pp.29-30
[214] My translation

includes the figure of Satan. Such a partnership is particularly fruitful if we consider the fact that the Romantic conception of Satan in England and France largely derives from Milton's Paradise Lost, in which Satan is presented less as the dark embodiment of Evil than as a rebel.[215] This is the Romantic image Hugo calls up here with that of Prometheus, to strengthen the depiction of the outlaw the poet represents. In this respect, thirty years or so after the writing of "Le Génie", we have to point out that there is a coherence in Hugo's representation of Prometheus. We could even discern a development of the Prometheus figure. Indeed, whereas in "Le Génie", Prometheus appeared as a symbol of human genius, a symbol which was linked to Chateaubriand, and therefore to the artist, in "Le couchant flamboyait à travers les bruines", the figure of the poet, this time, is totally projected on those of Prometheus and Satans. Hugo actually adds:

J'habite l'absolu, patrie obscure et sombre,

Pas plus intimidé dans tous ces gouffres d'ombre

Que l'oiseau dans les bois [216]

(I live in the homeland of Absolute, dark and obscure,

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[215] On this topic, see the fascinating The Sin of Knowledge, Ancient Themes and Modern Variations, by Theodore Ziolkowski, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000.

It is also worth noticing that P.B. Shelley also associated Prometheus with Satan : in his preface to Prometheus Unbound (in Shelley's Poetry and Prose, ed. by Donald H. Reinman and Sharon B Powers,. Norton & Co., London, New York, 1977, p.133), Shelley suggests that "The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan because, in addition to courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which in the Hero of Paradise Lost, interfere with the interest. The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. In the minds of those who consider that magnificent fiction with a religious feeling, it engenders something worse. But Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends".

[216] In *Le Moi*, IX. Toute la lyre, by Victor Hugo, Nelson, Paris, 1916, p.29

Not more intimidated in all these gulfs of shadow

Than the bird in the wood)

Although subtle, an identification between the outlaw poet contemplating the ocean and Prometheus is now at stake in the use of the Titanic figure by Hugo, and hinges on his conception of genius.

To this construction on Prometheus, Hugo adds an important feature in 1856, with "La Vision des montagnes" ("The Vision of Mountains"), a poem dated from 2 July. Although it was composed later than "Le couchant flamboyait à travers les bruines", it is the opening poem of Toute la Lyre, and of its first section, entitled "L'Humanité" ("Mankind"). The general meaning of "La Vision des montagnes"[217] is problematic inasmuch as the poem is composed of different mythological and biblical pictures whose linking remains partly enigmatic. However, it is worth noticing that the first scene of the poem is that of Prometheus bound on Mount Caucasus. It is perceived by the poet, from above "black rolling clouds":

Ce faîte monstrueux sortait de l'ombre obscure ;	*This monstruous summit emerged from the dark [shadow,*
Ses pentes se perdaient dans le gouffre inconnu ;	*Its slopes vanishing in the unknown gulf ;*
Sur ce plateau gisait, fauve, terrible, nu,	*On this plateau was lying a giant,*
Un géant, dont le corps se tordait sur la pierre ;	*Wild, terrible, naked, his body convulsing on the [stone ;*
Il en coulait du sang avec de la lumière ;	*Blood and light were flowing out of it ;*
Sa face regardait le ciel sombre, et ses pieds,	*His face was looking at the dark sky, and his feet,*
Ses coudes, ses genoux,ses poings, étaient liés	*His elbows, his knees, and fists, were bound*
D'une chaîne d'airain vivante, impitoyable ;	*With a living chain of bronze, pitiless ;*

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[217] In Toute la lyre, vol.I, I, 1, by Victor Hugo, Nelson, Paris, 1916, pp.19-21

Et je voyais décroître et renaître effroyable *And I saw his entrails awfully diminish and regrow,*

Son ventre qu'un vautour rongeait, oiseau bandit. *Eaten away by a vulture, a criminal bird.*

Le patient était colossal ; on eût dit *The patient was colossal; These were like*

Deux montagnes, dont l'une agonisait sur l'autre. *Two mountains, one of which was dying on the*

[other

-Quel est, dis-je, le sang qui coule ainsi ?-Le vôtre,- *Whose, I said ,is this flowing blood ?-Yours,-*

Dit le vautour. Ce mont dont tu vois les sommets, *Said the vulture. This mount, of which you can see*

[the

summits

C'est le Caucase. –Et quand t'en iras-tu ?-Jamais.- *Is Caucasus. –And when will you leave ?-Never.-*

Et le supplicié me cria : Je suis l'Homme. *And the martyr told me screaming : I am*

Mankind.

Before analysing that depiction of Prometheus, it is important to examine it in its context, and to put it in perspective. Indeed, the following scene in "La Vision des montagnes" is that of the Flood and Noah's Ark, which leads the poet to this questioning, lines 32 and 33:

-Quoi! dis-je, est-on crée pour être anéanti ? *- What! I said, were we created to be*

annihilated?

O terre ! Est-ce ta faute ? O ciel ! est-ce ton crime ? *O earth! Is it your fault ? O heaven! Is it your*

[crime?

We can see here that the problem of the relationship between a creator and his creatures is raised. The third scene represents Olympia, the place where "reigned the horrible joy"(line 38), and in which mankind is the target of gods' arrows. The fourth depicts Moses on Mount Sinai,

Un homme face à face avec Dieu dans un rêve,	*A man face to face with God in a dream,*
Un prophète effrayant qui recevait un glaive,	*A frightening prophet who was given a sword,*
Et qui redescendit plein d'un céleste ennui	*And who climbed down again full of celestial boredom*
Vers la terre, emportant de la foudre avec lui...	*Towards the earth, taking lightening with him...*
Et l'infini cria : Sinaï !	*And the infinite shouted : Sinai !*

And eventually, the fifth and last scene is an evocation of the Calvary :

Un homme expirait là, cloué sur un gibet,	*A man was dying there, pinned to a gibbet,*
Entre deux vagues croix où pendaient deux fantômes ;	*Between two vague crosses where two ghosts*
[...]	*[...]*
[hung	
Et le supplicié me cria : Je suis Dieu.	*And the martyr told me screaming : I am God.*

Although it is not very clear how to interpret the biblical episode of Moses on Mount Sinai given the changing aspect of Hugo's beliefs towards religion and rites, it nonetheless appears that the unifying theme of the poem is the persecution of man by God(s), the climax of the poem being when a god himself, because he is also part of mankind, becomes a martyr. The use of the Prometheus myth in this context is therefore a fruitful one. More than simply a myth character, the Titan appears as a powerful symbol of mankind. Parallel to the use of this symbolic material, the poem develops the themes the myth itself contains: the injustice of gods, and the unintelligible punishment which derives from it. Even if Hugo does not use the Titanic figure to represent the poet himself in "La Vision des montagnes", it is nonetheless fascinating to notice that Prometheus, here again, is associated with Jesus Christ. Whereas on the one hand the godlike Titan claims he is mankind, on the other

hand, the one who seems to be a man claims that he is a god. We have to consider here the fact that the choice Hugo made to represent Jesus Christ on his cross is all but fortuitous, since this episode of the Bible coincides with the moment when Jesus Christ feels he is abandoned by god, and cries out his famous "God, why have you forsaken me?"[218].

This passage from the Bible particularly appealed to French Romanticists,[219] as it perfectly illustrated man's anguish and the impossibility of understanding the designs of God, should he exist. A link appears with the Prometheus myth, in that this interest in a "Romantic Christ" coincides with the same concern shown by what Vaclav Cerny[220] calls "Titanism", which is a moral attitude rejecting the moral of punishment that suppresses the freedom of man. According to this theory, "Ancient Titans once rebelled against Heaven. Modern Titans are doing the same. However, they do not wish to replace the Gods. They only want to be men, but they want to be fully men. They try to perfectly accomplish the idea of man, and want to do so by creating free individualities, driven by autonomous moral laws. Such is their individualism. They believe their aspirations are justified by Reason and human moral sense. In the name of those, they protest and rebel against the regime de facto, established on earth by a

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[218] In the Bible, Psalm XXI: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

[219] This interest derived less from a biblical tradition than from a poetical one which started in the 18th century with Jean-Paul Richter, who imagined a dreamlike episode in which the apparition of Jesus Christ announces the death of God. Vigny, Stendhal, and Baudelaire were Jean-Paul's heirs in this respect, although they transferred the dreamlike scene on the Golgotha or the Mount of Olives, in which the human side of Jesus Christ was the strongest. Because he expressed his doubts, his anguish, and his suffering during those episodes, he became an emblem for the Romanticists.

[220] In Essai sur le titanisme dans la poésie romantique occidentale entre 1815 et 1850, by Vaclav Cerny, Prague, 1935

divinity, a regime which to human eyes is neither rational nor moral and which even tries to cover up its moral anomalies by pretending it is unintelligible to human reason, that is to say by simply slandering the spirit of man."[221] Their rebellion would thus be against what is beyond human understanding and generates an unjustified guilt. If we consider this theory, the association of Prometheus with Jesus Christ by Hugo in the inaugural poem of "L'Humanité" truly makes sense, and also casts light on the very title of this section. In fact, both figures, although coming from different sources, reflect the anguish of man facing the Absolute, whatever form it might take. In a poem dealing with the ill-founded persecution of man, the striking scene of the Titan's martyrdom combined with that of Jesus Christ on his cross offers the perfect illustration of Titanism. It might be because Hugo's poetry and use of the Prometheus figure perfectly reflects the Romantic concerns that Hugo himself was associated with Prometheus' figure, even if he is not omnipresent in his poetry.

It is actually remarkable that other poets contributed to develop a link between Hugo and Prometheus, and this in different ways. Baudelaire, in his Fusées, makes the following comment on the French poet: "Hugo often thinks of Prometheus. He applies an imaginary vulture to his chest, which is only made to throb by the moxas of vanity".[222] Even if, in this context, Charles Baudelaire takes the opportunity to make fun of Hugo's inordinate ego, it is interesting to see that in its sarcastic way he nevertheless reveals the process of an identification between Hugo and the Titan. It might well have been verbally expressed by Hugo himself, but, with no such evidence, we must conclude that the very use of Prometheus as a symbol, under the forms we

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[221] In T.P.L.E., p.394
[222] In Journaux Intimes, by Charles Baudelaire, Fusées, XV

previously examined, led Baudelaire to identify Hugo with the Titan. Given the connection made between the figure of the poet and that of Prometheus in Hugo's poems, and given also the fact that the Titanic figure carries Romantic concerns with his martyrdom, this identification was probably meant to be an appropriate one. It also fed the imagination of nineteenth century cartoonists (Fig.6). [223]

Fig.6

However, the main reason for this parallel between Hugo and Prometheus probably lies in the striking visual representation of the outlaw on his rock, facing the sea,

[223] L'Olympe, by Charles-Gilbert Martin, *Le Don Quichotte*, 22 juillet 1876

which Hugo himself realised in his drawings, and which he also embodied in pictures for which he posed (Fig.7)[224].

Fig.7

It might actually explain why Swinburne also "identified Prometheus punished for his benefits with Hugo the exile, 'fate-stricken, and rejected of his own'."[225] Because Hugo wanted to represent the noblest figure, that is, according to him, that of the outlaw, of man fighting for his beliefs, and because he depicted it using the traditional representation of the Promethean martyrdom, he gradually annexed this symbol of human suffering to his personal imagery.

However, another great French literary Titan was to be associated with the Prometheus myth as well, but on different grounds. Although Honoré de Balzac, like Hugo, did not abundantly mention Prometheus in his work, each time he did was in a context we cannot neglect, since it was in the equivalent of an "ars poetica", in two of the most famous pages of the Comédie humaine.

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[224] Hugo à Jersey sur le rocher dit « des proscrits » (c.1852), photograph, BNF, Manuscripts, NAF 13353

[225] In T.P.L.E., p.484

b. "Prometheus, or the Life of Balzac"

« Tous ses livres ne forment qu'un livre, livre vivant, lumineux, profond, où l'on voit aller et venir et marcher et se mouvoir, avec je ne sais quoi d'effaré et de terrible mêlé au réel, toute notre civilisation contemporaine. » Victor Hugo[226]

If Honoré de Balzac is often identified with Prometheus, it is mostly because of the biography another famous French writer wrote on the novelist: that of André Maurois, entitled Prometheus, or the Life of Balzac.[227] Interestingly enough, such a title is only "justified" by one epigraph, a quotation from Balzac on the flyleaf saying: "Between Faust and Prometheus, I prefer Prometheus". In the rest of the biography, no mention is actually made of the Titan, although, in the twentieth century, Maurois' title was enough to establish a link between Prometheus and Balzac. However, one could sensibly assume that the biography title was explained by Balzac's unique and gigantic project. Balzac's Comédie humaine answered the will of the novelist to build a system, through the means of literature, in order to create a perfect fictional society which would reflect the real one. This ambition itself – to create an infinite number of characters who would reappear within the cycle and interact together – is of Titanic design, because of its gigantic proportions, of course, but also because of its very nature. Indeed, Balzac was aware that his project of giving literary shape to his countless human creatures was properly Promethean. As a creator, he put himself in the position of a "Prometheus plasticator". The coherence and achievement of his project depended on his ability to take on this role.

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226 "All his books only constitute one book, a lively, luminous, deep one, in which we see all our contemporary civilisation come and go, walk, and move, with this frightful and terrible *je ne sais quoi* mingled with reality." in La Comédie humaine, tome I, by Honoré de Balzac, La pléiade, Gallimard, 1979, p.XIX

227 Prométhée, ou la vie de Balzac, by André Maurois, Hachette, Paris, 1965

He first took Prometheus as a model in a work which he himself named his "aesthetic catechism", his Chef-d'œuvre inconnu[228] (The Unknown Masterpiece), first published in 1831. We have to bear in mind that this short story was part of a trilogy, and therefore, we must put it in perspective. Massimilla Doni and Gambara were actually composed at the same time, and Balzac himself, in a letter to Mme Hanska,[229] established the link which exists between his three works: in his system,[230] the three short stories were meant to deal with the annihilation of the work of art (and also, in the case of Massimilla Doni and Gambara, of its musical interpretation) which occurs when the creative principle is excessive. As Pierre-Georges Castex puts it, the three short stories "elaborate on the fundamental postulate of the destructive power of thought, when applied to the field of Arts".[231] The theme of the "failure" of the work of art is represented, in The Unknown Masterpiece, by that of the imaginary painter Frenhofer. It is at the heart of the questioning of this problem, as part of Balzac's ars poetica, that the figure of Prometheus is conjured up. The work of art which does not succeed as such is precisely described as lacking Prometheus' fire. Indeed, Frenhofer, criticizing Porbus' painting, says: "You only breathed a portion of your soul into your beloved work. Prometheus' torch went out more than once in your hands, and many spots on your painting have not been touched by the celestial flame".[232] Further on, he evokes the difficulty "of melting together with the fire of [...] genius two rival

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228 In La Comédie humaine, tome X, by Honoré de Balzac, La Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1979, pp.413-438

229 *Ibid.* p.393

230 Balzac wanted to create a social system analogous to that of nature, inspired by Buffon's theory, that as well as zoological species, social species existed. In this respect, he aimed to include in his system "studies of manners" (they represented the major part of his work, divided into scenes of the provincial, Parisian, country, political, military life...), "philosophical studies", to examine the causes of these manners, and, eventually, "analytical studies", concerning their principles.

231 In La Comédie humaine, tome X, by Honoré de Balzac, La Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1979, p.393

232 In *Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu.* La Comédie humaine, tome X, by Honoré de Balzac, La Pléiade, Gallimard, 1979, p.417

styles".[233] In those thoughts on aesthetics, we find two elements we had previously encountered in the use of the Prometheus myth: first, the Prometheus figure understood as a creative power, a power which gives life to objects; second, its association with the figure of the artist, and, more specifically, of the genius. This emphasis on the Titan as Prometheus plasticator, and the fact that his power is circumscribed to the aesthetic and artistic fields, conjures up another myth, in which the figure of the artist is also at stake, that of Pygmalion. Balzac himself throws a bridge between them, and even seems to take one for the other. In The Unknown Masterpiece, the greatest master, Frenhofer, initially corrects Porbus' painting of a woman, before the fascinated eyes of young Nicolas Poussin, who, as a novice, is willing to develop his skills. Although Frenhofer pretends he just improved Porbus' painting to make it more lively, the two other painters believe that they are facing perfection. Under the charm, Porbus begs Frenhofer to let Poussin and himself see the painting he has been working on for ten years. His refusal is categorical: the painter, in love with his painting of Catherine Lescault, cannot possibly exhibit his lover, whom he jealously hides from other people. He then explains to Poussin, "It has been ten years, young man, that I have worked on it; but what are ten little years when it is about fighting against nature? We do not know how long it took Sir Pygmalion to make the only statue that walks[234]!".[235] Frenhofer also details at length the nature of his love, or, should we say, blinded passion for his painting. In this respect, his

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[233] *Ibid.*

[234] The original text says : « Nous ignorons le temps qu'employa le seigneur Pygmalion pour faire la seule statue qui ait marché ! », Balzac playing here on the double meaning of « marcher », as in "to walk", or as in "to work", "to function".

[235] In *Le Chef-d'Oeuvre inconnu*. La Comédie humaine, tome X, by Honoré de Balzac, La Pléiade, Gallimard, 1979, p.425

feelings are very close to those of Pygmalion, who also fell in love with his work of art: "Do you want me to suddenly stop being a father, a lover, and God? This woman is not a creature, she is a creation",[236] Frenhofer adds. Here, Balzac seems to mix the myth with that of Pygmalion, inasmuch as the novelist, within the Prometheus myth, underlines the power of the Titan to give life, like a god, to his beloved creatures.[237] However, whereas Pygmalion idolises a statue which is already formed and accomplished, and which he loves as such, Frenhofer, tirelessly, keeps working on his painting. According to Balzac, it is this very process which dooms him. When, at the end of the short story, he eventually agrees to show Catherine Lescault to Porbus and Nicolas Poussin, what the two painters perceive is just a chaos of paint. Because Frenhofer endlessly strives towards perfection, examines and questions his creation, by doing so, he eventually destroys it.

The fact that he wants to equal God in the process of creation might precisely entail both his failure and the parting between the Pygmalion and Prometheus myths, leading to the predominance of Prometheus. Indeed, in Balzac's thought, as exposed in his "aesthetic catechism", it appears there is no room for the artist to equal nature and God, and the rivalry with gods traditionally appears as a feature characteristic of the Prometheus myth. Interestingly, Frenhofer himself warns his colleague against the temptation of copying nature (which would be, were it possible, to rival it), although,

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[236] *Ibid.*, p.431

[237] Balzac expressed the same idea, and mixed the two myths together in the newspaper *La Silhouette*, in 1830: "One evening, in the middle of the street, one morning, when getting up, or amongst a jolly orgy, live charcoal, sometimes, touches this head, these hands, this tongue; suddenly a word wakes up ideas; they are born, they grow, they are in a ferment. A tragedy, a painting, a statue, a comedy show their daggers, their colours, their outlines, their gibes [...] it is a group worthy of Pygmalion, a woman whom possession would kill even Satan's heart". The combination of the theme of fire, characteristic of the Prometheus myth, with the myth of Pygmalion, shows once more their link in Balzac's mind.

ironically, he is its first victim: "The task of Art is not to copy nature, but to express it!".[238] In fact, if he annihilates his own creation, it is essentially by trying to create the perfect woman, and not the most beautiful painting. However, Frenhofer's words appear as the first rule of Balzac's "ars poetica". As Félix Davin puts it, in his introduction to Etudes de moeurs au XIXème siècle , according to Balzac, "nature, to be grasped in its deepest truth, had to be analysed, i.e. broken up into its component parts, and then rebuilt, its life given back by a new animation",[239] and not copied. Balzac certainly succeeded in his ambition, if we consider the eagerness of contemporary readers and critics to recognise existing people in Balzac's characters, whereas he precisely wanted to create types, since they gather the particular features of all of those who look like these types, and are therefore paradoxically "more real".

Balzac, in La Cousine Bette, refines this thought when one of his characters, commenting on art, advances that "Sculpture is like dramatic art, both the most difficult and easiest of all arts. Copy a model, and the work is accomplished; but to imprint a soul on it, to make a type by representing a man or a woman, is the sin of Prometheus."[240]Apart from defining his own ambition as an artist through his character, the novelist, here, presents Prometheus' gift of life as a sin, which would strengthen the idea that Frenhofer is punished precisely for attempting to rival God, as Prometheus was before him. Indeed, even if the way Balzac understands "sin" does not necessarily rely on the original treatment of the Prometheus myth, like that of Hesiod (and possibly that of Æschylus' trilogy), in which he was blamed for the loss

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[238] In *Le Chef-d'Oeuvre inconnu*. La Comédie humaine, tome X, by Honoré de Balzac, La Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1979, p.418

[239] *Ibid.*

[240] In *La Cousine Bette*. La Comédie humaine, tome VII, by Honoré de Balzac, La Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1979, p.245

of the golden age and punished for his hubris, and even if Prometheus' flame allows the creation of the perfect work of art, a reference is nonetheless made to the will to equal God/nature, and to breaking the divine law.

The way in which Honoré de Balzac interprets the figure of Prometheus, through a combination with the Pygmalion myth and under the assumption that the Promethean flame, stolen from the gods, is a gift whose implications are almost Faustian, presents an original conception of the artist. The Promethean power appears as a magical one, over which it is difficult, not to say impossible, to gain control. Balzac understands the Prometheus myth as a parable of artistic creation, a conception which derives from one of Prometheus' original features as plasticator. Franz Liszt, in this perspective, also saw in Prometheus the mask of the artist. The Hungarian musician and composer, interestingly, shared the same social circles in Paris as Hugo and Balzac, and the three men had a strong admiration for one another. Before studying the Symbolist perception of the Prometheus myth, it is invaluable to examine Liszt's personal interpretation of the Titan, since in many aspects it foretells the Symbolist one.

c. Prometheus, the Apostle Artist.

When Franz Liszt started working on Prometheus,[241] he had chosen a new path, becoming a *Kappelmeister* in Weimar (1848-1861). During those years, Liszt was particularly prolific in his output, and such productivity was undoubtedly linked to the fact that he felt it was his duty, through his art, to reveal God to others. According to

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[241] Prometheus (1855), by Franz Liszt, Symphonic Poem n°5

Mara Lacché, his "intense activity in Weimar is the result of the influence that the stimulating Parisian intellectual environment and his meeting with the Countess d'Agoult had in his musical, aesthetic and literary education",[242] and it is not surprising that such a development took place in what Liszt himself called "the fatherland of the Ideal".[243] Prometheus was definitely written under the influence of Weimar, since it was originally composed by Liszt in 1850 for the commemoration of the anniversary of Johann Friedrich Herder's birth, during which a statue of the German poet and thinker was unveiled. Liszt, for the occasion, composed an overture and choruses for Herder's Der Entfesselte Prometheus,[244] entitled Chöre zu Herders "Entfesseltem Prometheus".[245] Even though Herder was the revered master of Goethe in his youth, his interpretation of Prometheus was very different. Indeed, Herder used the Promethean figure to illustrate an idealist conception of History: Prometheus being the symbol of the perpetual progress of the divine Spirit, which gradually unveils all the extent of the powers of mankind. In the same spirit, Liszt soon developed his overture and choruses to create a symphonic poem and chose as a compositional principle to emphasise four characteristics of Herder's Prometheus.

Liszt could actually express his own philosophy by developing four themes: audacity, suffering, endurance and salvation, the four main qualities attributed to Prometheus.

"Audacity", the first energetic theme (bars 4 to 6), is formed of eight notes, with the dominance of the fourth, which contributes to the conquering aspect of the theme.

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[242] In Ostinato Rigore n°18, « L'humanisme de J.G. Herder dans la pensée esthético-musicale de F. Liszt », by Mara Lacché, Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 2001, p.44. My translation

[243] Quoted by Mara Lacché, *ibid.*, p.44. My translation

[244] In Der Entfesselte Prometheus, by Johann Gottfried Herder, in Sämmtliche Werke, Hildesheim, Olms-Weidmann, 1994

[245] Chöre zu Herders « Entfesseltem Prometheus » (1850) R.539, by Franz Liszt

However, from bar 28, this "audacity" is soon followed by the "suffering" theme. From bar 160, the "endurance" theme can be heard, the idea of time being ingenuously tranposed by a contrapuntal writing, which emphasises linearity. This third compositional part finds a climax when the first three themes are given simultaneously thanks to the horizontal writing adopted by Liszt, who thus manages to express the main characteristics of Prometheus' persona. The last theme, "salvation", is given form bar 129, and, as Mara Lacché notes, "answers" the previous theme.[246] Even though there are four themes in Liszt's symphonic poem, it is interesting to notice that the general structure remains a sonata form, based on two principal themes: endurance and salvation, two qualities which were surely not fortuitously highlighted by the composer. As Mara Lacché put it, Liszt was deeply influenced by the ideas of l'abbé Félicité de La Mennais[247] and the notion of "people's Christianity". La Mennais actually communicated to Liszt the idea that God was revealed through art, and that artists were "apostles", "priests of an ineffable mysterious, eternal religion, which germinates and ceaselessly grows in all the hearts".[248] The word "apostle" is particularly interesting and proved to be influential, since, in Liszt's foreword to the score of Prometheus, the composer explains that he chose to set to music Der Entfesselte Prometheus, because it was "one of the works of that kind in which the purest and the most generous feelings of the one who was called the apostle of mankind was expressed the best".[249] These words by Liszt are essential to understand the value that he attributed to the treatment of Prometheus, as a Kappelmeister. Indeed, Liszt did not perceive the pagan origin of

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[246] In *L'humanisme de J.G. Herder dans la pensée esthético-musicale de F. Liszt*, by Mara Lacché, Ostinato Rigore n°18, Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 2001, p.52. My translation
[247] *Ibid.*, p.45
[248] Quoted by Mara Lacché, *ibid.*, p.45. My translation.
[249] In Prometheus, by Franz Liszt, Ernst Eulenburg, Leipzig, 1850

the myth, and did not see the myth itself within Prometheus. Like Herder, he probably saw in him the human accomplishment of godlike designs, but, by association, because the revelations of those designs were also in the hands of artists, Prometheus, according to Liszt, was a typification of the artist. In the same perspective, in the foreword to the score, Liszt underlines the "creative activity"[250] which characterises the Titan. Even though Prometheus, for Liszt, was part of a divine revelation (modelled by an idealist conception of History), the Titan appeared to the Hungarian composer as the archetype of the artist, as was the case with Hugo and Balzac. This interpretation would soon be echoed by Symbolism, but Liszt also had intriguing words concerning the Prometheus myth, announcing the Symbolist perception of the Prometheus myth: "it [the Prometheus myth] has always talked to one's imagination, troubled with the secret correspondences of that symbolic account with our most obstinate instincts, with our sourest grieves, with our sweetest forefeelings".[251]

By examining the specificity of the interpretations of Prometheus during the first half of the nineteenth century, we have had the opportunity to notice that the figure of Prometheus was increasingly used to represent the artist, which explains, in Balzac's case, a shift towards the Pygmalion myth. The focus adopted on the Prometheus myth became more and more specific, and strove, in one way or another, towards an identification between the Titan and the artist. When Romanticism started in Europe and England, the Prometheus myth as such started to disappear in the works of artists, in favour of the symbol Prometheus represented. The Titan being now perceived as a man or a pure human form, the set of questions and values contained in the myth

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[250] *Ibid.*
[251] *Ibid.*

changed. Because it took a metaphysical colour, men projected themselves in the image of Prometheus, who became a typification of man, and, more and more, of the artist. This pattern was to be of great interest to Symbolist artists.

III. Prometheus and the crisis of faith

"One is forced to ponder the fact that in almost every epoch of history where the arts flourish and taste reigns we find humanity in decline and can give no single example where in a people a high degree and a general breadth of aesthetic culture go together with political freedom and civic virtue, where beautiful customs go together with good customs and cultivated manners go together with truth."

Friedrich Schiller.[252]

In order to take the whole measure of the importance of the Prometheus figure in the artistic field during the second half of the nineteenth century and especially during the "fin de siècle", it is essential to look into the case of what was called Symbolism. To appreciate what Prometheus meant to the artists of this period, and the very nature of their relationship with this figure, we have to leave the Titan temporarily to examine the specificity of Symbolism, and its link to the crisis of faith with which Prometheus is associated. I will consider the nature of this so-called movement, what it revealed of an entire generation, and try to clarify as far as possible its relation to Decadence and Aestheticism, which is sometimes misleadingly described. A reason for this confusion is that these "movements" are

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252 In « Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Riehe von Briefen » 10. Brief. Werke (Nationalausgabe) vol.20, Weimar, 1949-1993, p.339

often associated with different countries, which tends to create a geographical segmentation of Symbolism, Aestheticism, and sometimes Decadence. We shall see that actually, Symbolism is inseparable from a crisis of faith and values, which will effectively lead us to point out religious borders, and therefore to distinguish different forms that Symbolism took, to distinguish its variations. One of the crucial aspects we shall discover during our examination of Symbolism is its very particular conception of 'myth', something that had considerable consequences when applied to the Prometheus myth.

1. Symbolism and Myth

a. United in spirit : Symbolism, Aestheticism and Decadence

Symbolism has a date of birth, 18 September 1886, on which Jean Moréas, in Le Figaro, wrote the Manifesto of Symbolism. Does this mean that Moréas was the father of Symbolism, its creator and leader, instead of Mallarmé and, to a certain extent, Verlaine? And was Symbolism originally literary and French? The task of defining and delimiting the lineaments of Symbolism is certainly not an easy one, even if this "event" in September 1886 gives an illusion of clarity and "classification". Moréas, for that matter, was fond of manifestos and definitions: in 1891, he also launched the "Romanic School", which indicates that we have to take many precautions concerning the origin of Symbolism. Another difficulty with Symbolism is that its best representatives, such as Mallarmé, often refused to be labelled as Symbolists. They felt they did not truly belong to any movement, which certainly indicates the main clue for understanding Symbolism: if it is so difficult to apprehend and discern its coherence as a "school", that might be because it was not a

movement, but a spirit, a state of mind. As a matter of fact, Symbolism gathered artists of many different fields and styles. The most famous theorist of Symbolism, Paul Valéry, in his attempts to explain the phenomenon, came up with more than fifty definitions of Symbolism, which highlights the impossibility of accomplishing this enterprise. However, in his Etudes littéraires, Paul Valéry explains his failure to give a final definition of Symbolism: "The unity that we can name Symbolism does not rely on an aesthetic conformity; Symbolism is not a school. It admits, on the contrary, a lot of schools, and very different ones, and as I told you: Aesthetics divided them; Ethics united them."[253] Symbolism would actually be a matter of moral or spiritual attitude, and not a question of movement, leaders, or aesthetic rules. It is worth mentioning, in this perspective, that certain theorists of Aestheticism and Decadence deplored the absence of manifestos or precise dates of birth to mark out these "movements", which they contrasted with Symbolism! Indeed, the outlines of those aesthetic trends are nebulous, but certainly not less so than the contours of Symbolism, despite an alleged date of birth. Worst than that, the three trends sometimes seemed to contaminate each other and to be superimposed one upon the other. Even geographical partitions did not properly constrain the respective characteristics of each "school". For more clarity and consistency, attention will be paid to the distinctions, or, to be more precise, on the similarities between Symbolism, Decadence, and Aestheticism.

The birth of Aestheticism is often said to coincide with the publication of Mademoiselle de Maupin, by Théophile Gautier, in 1835. According to William

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253 In Œuvres, tome I, Variétés, Etudes Littéraires, by Paul Valéry, ed. by J.Hytier, La Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1968, p.694

Gaunt, with this novel, "all ecstasies and all excesses were justified in the search for sensation and the delight in beauty which, the author implied, was a law unto itself".[254] If the young "bohemians", the future Aesthetes, identified with the ideas expressed in the novel, it is surely because it put their own feelings into words: they despised the bourgeois spirit which had developed and expanded with the industrial revolution, and defended values which were at the opposite pole to this new culture. As William Gaunt puts it, "Bohemians had one law, one morality, one devotion, and that was –Art. It had to be so, for it was their sole justification. They were responsible for it, as, in the previous century, noble patrons had been. They must, now that so few others were interested, preserve it like a sacred mystery".[255] Hence their motto, "l'art pour l'art", "art for art's sake", initially the creation of Victor Cousin during a lecture in la Sorbonne, which was later adopted by Théophile Gautier. However, France was not the best land for the doctrine of art for art's sake to develop in. On the other hand, England appeared to be so, and, from the 1860s, thanks to figures like Walter Pater and Algernon Swinburne, it became Aestheticism. It must actually be borne in mind that on the continent, nations had to deal with consecutive revolutions, the final trauma being, for France and Belgium, that 1870. The continent also had to cope with the difficulties entailed by the industrial revolution, whereas England had gone through that process fifty years earlier. What England had to face in the second half of the nineteenth century was "the spirit of competition and excessive conformity",

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[254] In The Aesthetic Adventure, by William Gaunt, Jonathan Cape, London, 1945, p.8
[255] *Ibid.*, p.10

which "weighed too heavily on social life".[256] In this special context, a certain number of artists and individuals tried to escape this "dead-end" by turning towards the idea of Beauty conceived as the Absolute, and towards the expression of this supreme value. Aestheticism appeared as a true philosophy of life, and was therefore more than the principle of Art for art's sake on which it was based. As Bertrand Marchal puts it, "during the Symbolist period, Aestheticism borders on the religion of Art".[257] In this element of definition, it must also be stressed that an association is made between Symbolism and Aestheticism.

As for Decadence, the distinction between Symbolism and that alleged movement is very difficult to define. All the important names in the Symbolist tradition, such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Oscar Wilde, Charles Baudelaire, or Joséphin Péladan, were classified either as Symbolists, or as Decadents. We also have to remember that Jean Moréas' manifesto of Symbolism was originally written to put forward the idea that the term "Symbolists" was a more suitable definition for those who were called "Decadents". To make things even more confusing, Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fézenac, who inspired Des Esseintes in Huysmans's A Rebours,[258] the so-called Bible of Decadence, was considered as the embodiment of the Decadent, when not presented as the Æsthete *par excellence*! Phillipe Jullian makes the following point: "While England was aesthetic, France was Decadent",[259] implying that the problems of definition and classification we are encountering are in fact a question of

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256 In Dreamers of Decadence : Symbolist Painters of the 1890s, by Philippe Jullian, Pall Mall Press, London, 1971, pp.25-26

257 In Lire le Symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.174

258 And also the Baron de Charlus to Proust, in A la recherche du temps perdu

259 In Dreamers of Decadence : Symbolist Painters of the 1890s, by Phillipe Jullian, Pall Mall Press, London, 1971, p.28

geography and cultural identity. However, the author immediately has to revise his assertion: "There were few Decadents in England, apart from certain disciples of Wilde, and few Aesthetes in France, although she can lay claim to the most exquisite of them all, Robert de Montesquiou".[260] Firstly, we can notice that Philippe Jullian's position concerning the 'quarrel' about de Montesquiou is that the count was an Æsthete and not a Decadent. Secondly, the exceptions he makes to his original assertion are considerable. Indeed, Wilde was certainly the most important character in the English artistic milieu at that time (not to say of the European artistic milieu), and such an exception, rather than proving the rule, tends to prove that it is wrong. Moreover, another question, which also divides theorists, is to ask whether Oscar Wilde was a Decadent, an Æsthete, or a Symbolist.

It is traditionally said that Decadence is the dark and mystical side of Symbolism, which includes this trend. As a matter of fact, the individuals who claimed to be Decadents had specific points of reference that were on the fringe of Symbolism. As Bertrand Marchal puts it,[261] the critics used the term 'Decadent' in a pejorative way to define postclassical Latin writers, and Baudelaire and his followers appropriated the word to define their new sensitivity, as opposed to the illusions of progress. Thus, they willingly brought back to life, to define the art of that time, the myth of Byzantium and "byzantinism". However, the byzantinism in question was another way of expressing the Symbolist quest for the rare and the exotic. Moreover, it is interesting to see that Baudelaire, who praised himself for being a dandy and an Æsthete, is here linked to Decadence. To believe French poet Edouard Dujardin, who

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[260] *Ibid.*
[261] In Lire le Symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.173

was at the heart of the Symbolist experience, "two steps have to be distinguished within the grammatical evolution of Symbolism: firstly the 'Decadent act of speech'[...] which was an explosion, and which from the beginning resorted to the worst audacities; then what one could call the 'Symbolist act of speech', which is its continuation, but a considerably wiser continuation, involving the same patterns, but devoid of the previous excesses".[262]In this context, one must face the fact that, if it is so tedious to make a distinction between Aestheticism, Symbolism, and Decadence, it is certainly because they are part of the same nebula. Indeed, it is impossible to define those movements when considered as such. However, another way of clarifying what they are would be to examine what Decadents, Symbolists, and Aesthetes reacted against: this will allow us to observe a great coherence between them.

In actual fact, all of them were united in their rejection of materialism,[263] with all it implied. We must remember that the industrial revolution, on the continent and in England, had produced radical changes in society: in its composition, and, on a different scale, in social and religious practices. Cities largely developed, to become, as Symbolist Paul Verhaeren puts it, "sprawling towns", to the point that they were often described as proper monsters absorbing people. This metamorphosis, which occurred within a relatively short lapse of time, was a real upheaval on all levels, and

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[262] Quoted in The Symbolist Aesthetic in France 1885-1895, by A.G. Lehmann, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1950, 1968, p.17. My translation

[263] The Symbolist rejection of Naturalism, a movement best represented by Emile Zola, was another way of rejecting materialism. In actual fact, the naturalist school had chosen to depict nature and the consequences of materialism as realistically as possible. Naturalism and Symbolism embodied two opposite attitudes regarding materialism. Whereas Symbolism turned its back on materialism for a realm governed by idealism, Naturalism, on the other hand, tackled the immediate consequences of materialism through an aesthetic which examined them with great scrutiny.

although it produced wealth, misery was also considerable. One of the reactions, facing what materialism involved, was that adopted by Symbolists, Decadents, and Aesthetes: idealism, or the antithesis of this predominant materialism. However, their anti-materialism was not just a literary or aesthetic quarrel. It appeared as the result of a deep crisis.

This leads us to the second element of coherence between what are distinctively called Symbolism, Aestheticism, and Decadence. They all derived from the "mal du siècle", which means that all of them were engendered by Romanticism. As Edward Lucie-Smith puts it, "Symbolism, in the narrow, historical sense of the term, must be approached only as part of a larger whole: the Romantic Movement. Romanticism represents a crisis, a convulsion in the European spirit [...]".[264] At the end of the century, with a climax in the 1880s, the "mal du siècle" reached its maximum intensity. To take the representative example of France, Henri Scepi, with Paul Bourget's very influential Essais de psychologie contemporaine as a reference, reminds us of the fact that all the disenchanted generations of the nineteenth century, "that of 1801, that of 1830", and "that of 1855", "all of them knew, according to different fashions and in a variety of contexts, what the temptation of nihilism [...] [and] the neutralising crisis of will were".[265] The crisis in question just appeared as the prolongation of the upheaval Romanticism had originated, by focusing on the examination of the human heart. As Guy Michaud remarks, "All Romanticism gained through the development of positivist rationalism, was a critical judgment it was indeed lacking, but which, by giving it the taste of analysis, made this neurosis even

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[264] In Symbolist Art, by Edward Lucie-Smith, Thames and Hudson, London, 1972, 1977, p. 23
[265] In Les Complaintes de Jules Laforgue, by Henri Scepi, Gallimard, Paris, 2000, p. 33

more acute".[266] We shall later have the opportunity to show that the Romantic legacy to Symbolism, notably in the interpretation of the Prometheus myth, is extremely valuable. However, according to Henri Scepi,[267] because of the political and social crisis of the second half of the century, a radical doubt spread amongst the generation in question, and reached the very study of their heart (inherited from Romanticism), which became a proper exercise in dissection, and resulted in a deep discouragement. One of the answers to this crisis, or, at least, modes of expression of it, was Symbolism.

It cannot be entirely denied that Aestheticism and Decadence had their own particularities. Aestheticism was essentially directed towards the idea and expression of Beauty, and therefore less drawn to what was morbid or macabre. Decadence, on the other hand, was particularly provocative, and attracted to artificial paradises, and generally speaking, to exoticism. Moreover, we have to mention that Aesthetes and Decadents were not necessarily artists. In actual fact, both of those trends were, above all, philosophies of life (even if, for some individuals, this philosophy was only temporary: the conversion of Decadents into fervent practising Christians and Catholics was not rare). However, in spite of those differences, both were part of a wider spirit, which can be called Symbolism, since both were included in that Aesthetic expression of the vast nineteenth-century crisis, which reached its climax during the "fin de siècle". It remains for us to examine the detail that characterised this crisis, in order to understand what fed the particular state of mind known as Symbolism.

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[266] In Le Symbolisme tel qu'en lui-même, by Guy Michaud, Nizet, Paris, 1994, p.27
[267] *Ibid.*, p.34

If the shape of society, together with traditional practices, had totally changed with the industrial revolution, the structure and value on which society and the traditional world relied had slowly disintegrated. What people had to face was a world which had lost its meaning, its coherence, and what used to govern it: the Church, and, more importantly, its symbolic order. As Michael Gibson puts it, "At the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when triumphant scientism and positivism were announcing the coming of a better world based on Reason and technology, others were mainly sensitive to the loss of a quality, difficult to point out, but that they had found amongst the concerns of the old cultural system, that is to say in the values and meaning signified by what we could call its 'emblematic order'."[268] Thomas Carlyle, in Sartor Resartus[269], which had a noticeable impact on Symbolists, expressed the idea that the Church, the State, language, and Art were symbols, visible forms of spiritual objects, and that men were guided by those very symbols, be they recognised as such or not. Carlyle also feared that with the metamorphosis society underwent so quickly, men would be led to lose their faith. Even though this did not happen in England, Carlyle's fear materialised on the continent. In this context, the fact that artists resorted to the use of symbols essentially appeared as an attempt to reach the Absolute people had lost touch with, a symbol referring to an absent reality. In that case, a superior, idealistic order.

In this respect, although Symbolism is usually described as a retreat into an ivory tower, this vision is erroneous. The adepts of unrestrained progress accused the Symbolists of being a small isolated group of incurable conservatives, whereas, as

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[268] In Le Symbolisme, by Michael Gibson, Taschen, Paris, 1997, p.17
[269] Sartor Resartus, by Thomas Carlyle, ed. by Kerry Mcsweeney and Peter Sabor, Oxford Paperbacks, 2000

Michael Gibson notes, "the specificity of Symbolism [...] lies in the fact that it strives to voluntarily perpetuate, with the choice of a few individuals, a process which, so far, had been massive, involuntary, and largely unconscious [...]. The symbol had once been the very cement of the community".[270] The Symbolists were perceived as a group of eccentrics, whereas, in their own way – perhaps unconsciously – they wanted to preserve the "emblematic order" which gave meaning and consistency to the world they lived in. They were certainly a minority turned towards the past, but more profoundly, through this political and aesthetic quarrel, two opposite visions of the world can be perceived. The world of Progress, science, commerce, and industry which only discerned one level, Nature, as opposed to the world recognised by Symbolists, comprising the level of Nature related to that of a transcendency, God or His substitute. In this context, Symbolism was nothing less than the manifestation of a deep cultural crisis. Fed on a profound sense of disorientation and loss, it was a spirit, a state of mind striving towards the only thing that made sense to Symbolists, the Absolute. As I mentioned earlier, the Symbolist spirit was not limited to France, nor to continental Europe. It ignored geographical boundaries. However, Symbolism also deriving from a crisis of faith, it took different forms, depending on where it originated.

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[270] *Ibid.*, p.24

b. A Symbolist map of Europe

In most cases, geographical boundaries as such were not directly linked to the shape Symbolism took in Europe: above these contours, traditional religions seemed to determine the variations of Symbolism in Europe, which appears as a logical phenomenon. Because Symbolism derived from a crisis of faith, it took different forms depending both on the nature of the faith that was prevalent in the countries touched by that spirit, and on the intensity of the religious crisis. The fact that Symbolism hinges on an acute feeling of a loss, which is that of a faith, a spirituality, and an ancient set of values providing a meaning for existence, allows us to understand that the question of religions is absolutely essential. It actually determines the various facets of Symbolism. In this matter, we shall have the opportunity to consider that these declensions were particularly striking in the pictorial field: even if the traditional religions were rejected or faded during the period we are interested in, it is worth noticing that, through Symbolist art, the Protestant or Catholic legacies left their traces. Indeed, the common idea that Symbolism was limited to the Catholic part of the continent will have to be challenged: Symbolism might have developed to a larger extent in the Catholic part of Europe, a possibility we shall examine, but it does not necessarily mean that Protestant areas were not significantly affected by Symbolism. It is undeniable that the features of Symbolism varied according to religious legacies, but there was not one specific prevalent model. Moreover, another difficult case will have to be examine, that of Germany, which went through an identity crisis of a cultural nature, rather than of a religious nature. Its very history

will also be taken into account in order to understand the specificity of Symbolism in the new Reich, Austria and Switzerland, in order to draw a map of Symbolist Europe.

Symbolism, Catholicism and Protestantism: Belgium and France vs England

" The concept of what is diabolical emerges where that of modernity meets Catholicism"

Walter Benjamin.

I have already put forward the idea that it is certainly wrong to consider that Symbolism was born with Jean Moréas' manifesto, but what to think about the idea that Symbolism was born in a Catholic, continental and industrial country? Even if the reaction against industrialism is a key and a *sine qua non* condition for Symbolism to develop, the consideration of religion to define Symbolism is to be handled with great care. Indeed, we could also consider the Pre-Raphaelites, and more particularly Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as forerunners of this spirit,[271] even before Gustave Moreau This is even truer of the work of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, as we shall see in a further chapter, a painter who can be "classified" as a Pre-Raphaelite of the second generation. On the other hand, the assertion that the intensity and propagation of Symbolism was stronger in Catholic countries is also right, in the sense that the spiritual crisis associated with this religion was greater.

The loss of faith was more acutely felt in those countries, because of the tremendous importance of the rituals and emblematic aspect of Catholicism. Indeed, the social upheaval industrialisation entailed was not larger in Belgium or France: we have to

[271] The work of Millais was sometimes criticised for showing an interest in the traditional Catholic depiction of religious subjects, and for his very choice of those religious subjects, but the Pre-Raphaelites were nevertheless involved in a Protestant culture.

remember, with Michael Gibson,[272] that Doctor Barnardo's institutions in England welcomed no less than 50 000 abandoned children from the streets of London. Again, in must be kept in mind that England had been through the industrial revolution fifty years before continental Europe, which means that England had possibly already dealt with the acceptance of the radical changes that had occurred in society. However, the clue to understand this different apprehension of things probably lies in the fact that the very perception of this misery was not the same. As Michael Gibson puts it, " it looks as if the Reformation, whose requirements were born of an above all pragmatic conception of the world, elaborated in the first place by the new commercial and financial classes, had better prepared the minds to that type of events [the industrial revolution]".[273] Indeed, with the emphasis on the seven sacraments, the rites, the figure of the Blessed Virgin, and, perhaps even more importantly, on religious imagery and arts, "magical thinking" was absolutely essential to Catholicism. Catholic culture was actually steeped in a symbolic system, and, to a large extent, society relied on the emblematic order which resulted from it. We have to take the full measure of what it implied. As Bertrand Marchal puts it, to take the example of France, Symbolism was "an indication of a wider process of disintegration of the old orders and the emergence of the individual in a nineteenth century society which goes on digesting the Revolution for ever, and learns, willy-nilly, relativity.[...] As for economy, the absolute guarantee of gold is replaced by the development of fiduciary currencies. And, as a matter of fact, the entire old order, be it political, economical, religious, as well as literary, found its keystone in God, a

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[272] In Le Symbolisme, by Michael Gibson, Taschen, Paris, 1997 p.13
[273] *Ibid.*

God whose king, gold, or, to His measure, the patriarchal figure of Victor Hugo were, in their own fields, only representatives, or substitutes."[274] French society had gradually neglected the Church for almost a century, and the values on which it relied had already crumbled away, but what put the seal on the break-up with the Catholic Church was the rural exodus which accompanied the industrial revolution. Until then, the traditional practices which structured society had remained. But now, society had lost its very roots, and individuals had to face what they often perceived as a sort of disquieting chaos.

Belgium was even more touched by the religious crisis because of the political context it was experiencing. It became an independent state in 1830, but had been joined to Holland for 15 years. In reaction to this Calvinist and Dutch-speaking country, the Catholic religion had gained even more importance, especially in the upper classes of Belgian society, in which Symbolist art was to develop at the end of the century. Moreover, as Michael Gibson puts it, the country "knew, between 1860 and 1914, a remarkable industrial expansion [...]. This influx of richness also explains to a certain extent the great development the arts knew in Belgium, precisely at that time."[275] As we can see, all the elements we have previously observed in the emergence of Symbolism were gathered in Belgium, and the crisis regarding religion was particularly acute since Catholicism had been an important factor during the period when Belgium was joined to Holland. The righteous atmosphere which reigned in this prosperous country resulted in a strengthening of the moroseness felt by Symbolist artists. The deep spiritual crisis Belgium went through actually appears

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[274] In Lire le Symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.22
[275] In Le Symbolisme, by Michael Gibson, Taschen, Paris, 1997, p.87

as an essential key to understand why, with Belgian artists such as Félicien Rops, Jean Delville, Fernand Khnopff, and James Ensor, the Decadent and macabre aspect of Symbolism was extremely strong. In order to clarify this point, it is worth comparing the works of Khnopff with those of Edward Burne-Jones.[276] In actual fact, the aesthetic similarities between them are strong: the eerie androgynous characters, the idealised faces that always returned in their respective works, the immobility of figures, and the similar mellow light. However, whereas the work of Edward Burne-Jones has a mysterious and magical quality, Fernand Khnopff's characters are often seen in a deleterious atmosphere which does not exist in Edward Burne-Jones's paintings. Individual irreducible features aside, this difference could partly be explained by the dissimilarity of the spiritual crisis which was at the origin of their art.

It is actually worth noticing that in the countries of Catholic tradition, like France and Belgium, Symbolist art almost always evoked the sacred of which artists felt themselves so acutely deprived, even if this reference often took the intense form of a violation of the sacred, which explains why Decadence was generally perceived as a profaning attitude. This is why Belgian and French Symbolist artists frequently used traditional Catholic imagery or cult objects to express their uneasiness.[277] But, as Don Juan had challenged God before, those artists, in their own way, were searching for a form of the sacred with which they had lost touch. In this respect, we could say that

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[276] The respect and admiration they had for each other is well-known : Khnopff's Study of a Woman (1896, private collection, Turin, 23 × 15cm), which he offered to Burne-Jones, is a testimony of this mutual interest.

[277] To give an example amongst many, La Tentation de St Antoine, by Felicien Rops, 1878 (73.8 × 54.3 cm, Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, Brussels), which depicts a sensual naked woman replacing Jesus Christ on the cross appears to reveal the deep spiritual crisis artists of Catholic culture went through.

in this Catholic part of Europe, where the emblematic order had been so fundamental, the need to find a substitute for this form of spirituality had been stronger than in England. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, the development of Symbolism resulted more from a lassitude linked to the lack of depth of a materialistic and pragmatic philosophy of life than from a true religious crisis. Catholicism, during the industrial revolution, had revealed itself to be inadequate to "support" its flock, whereas Protestantism had prepared the believers for it, and this essential difference between the two cults had an effect on the very way artists depicted their subjects. Now that we have tried to explain briefly the major variations entailed by Protestantism, under the form of Anglicanism, and Catholicism, we have to look into the problem of Germany, Austria and Switzerland during this period, in order to understand the context in which painters like Böcklin and Klinger, who both depicted Prometheus, were caught up.

A special case: Germany and Switzerland

The question of religious borders in Germany in the 1870s is a delicate one, since the most important problem during this period appeared to be that of the preservation or rather dispersion of a common culture. In the context of the foundation of the Reich, the religious matter was only part of a larger cultural crisis. As William Vaughan puts it, Germany "was known to most as the land of thinkers and poets, unworldly people with relatively little political power or economic strength. This image was to change dramatically during the nineteenth century, being replaced after the establishment of the German Reich in 1870 with the image of a powerful,

organised and technologically advanced country which has remained more or less in place ever since."[278]The unification of Germany through the creation of the German Reich had been a dream as far back as the time of Holy Roman Empire, but did not satisfy all the expectations.[279] Indeed, the Reich failed to give a tangible cultural existence to Germany, which resulted in an identity crisis that was magnified amongst artists. As Walter Pape puts it, "after 1871 many thoughtful Germans were gripped by a mood of mingled pride and disenchantment; pride in the power and the unity of the Reich, disenchantment with the culture of the Empire, with the fact that beneath the crust of prosperous politics the old Germany was disintegrating, pulled apart by modernity – by liberalism, secularism, and industrialism. Common were the lamentations about the decline of the German spirit, the defeat of idealism by the forces of realism in politics and materialism in business."[280] The above descriptions of the effects of modernity on the German soul, as we can see, are very close to those which engendered the Symbolist crisis in England, France, and Belgium. Moreover, because of the redefinition of its borders, the new Germany excluded what had been absolutely essential to its cultural identity. As William Vaughan notes, that "Swiss Germans and Austrians, who would have thought of themselves as an integral part of 'Germany' in the early nineteenth century, now found themselves outsiders. This in itself contributed to a growing tension between the cultural and political concept of

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[278] In Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920, ed. by Ingrid Ehrhardt, and Simon Reynolds, "Spiritual Landscapes", by William Vaughan, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, p.79

[279] In this matter, William Vaughan, in the work above mentioned, specifies that the new Germany, "at once industrialised and authoritarian, [...] was neither the reconstituted feudal Holy Roman Empire dreamed of by right wings romantics, nor the utopian democracy that those on the left had sought to engineer", p.79

[280] In 1870/71-1989/90 German Unifications and the Change of Literary Discourse, edited by Walter Pape, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 1993, p.5

what was 'German'."[281] The concept of "Kulturnation" German intellectuals had dreamt of proved to be illusory, and instead of coherence, what emerged was a feeling of a cultural estrangement.

Only once this cultural and political background has been established can we tackle the problem of religion in Germany, since the cultural issue, in the development of "German" Symbolism, was more at stake than the religious problem, which only strengthened the identity crisis that we mentioned. When the Reich was founded, the North of Germany was traditionally Lutheran whereas the south was Catholic. However, we cannot really find a clear difference in the inspiration and style of the Symbolist works made in the Northern and Southern parts of what was Germany. As a matter of fact, great Symbolist artists like Max Klinger and Arnold Böcklin, who both worked on the Prometheus figure, found their pictorial expression in a vitalist imagery which spread in the new Reich, and which also appeared as the result of that identity crisis. In actual fact, as if to remedy it, they drew their inspiration from an idealised golden age, now coming from Greek and Roman mythology, now coming from an old Nordic mythology, possibly because the foundation of the Reich brought to their mind the dream of a renaissance as well as of a unity around a common past, through myths. However, although German Symbolism reflects this dream, the Reich being deceptive in its ability to protect, build, and develop a German culture, German Symbolist art also shows the artists' concern in nightmarish paintings. If we take the example of the work of the Swiss German Arnold Böcklin, who, ironically, is usually

[281] In Kingdom of the Soul : Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920, ed. by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, "Spiritual Landscapes", by William Vaughan, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, p.79

classified as a German painter,[282] we can notice that it is peopled with demons and malevolent creatures, who confer a Decadent atmosphere. However, it lacks the evanescent and dreamy aspect we can find sometimes in most Decadent paintings, those of Fernand Khnopff, for example. That difference of atmosphere certainly relies on Böcklin's very special use of colours, which precisely endows his paintings with vitalist qualities.

Interestingly, German-speaking Symbolist artists seemed to make up for the political unification and cultural disintegration of the Reich by reacting against the arts establishment. Whereas in Belgium, France, and England, the reaction against religion and politics had taken shape through an aesthetic style, in Germany, artists also organised themselves to defend this characteristic style. In actual fact, this is how the Secession was founded, first in Munich in 1892, then in Vienna in 1897, and eventually in Berlin in 1899. This artistic organisation was fraught with consequences, since, as Michael Gibson puts it, "From this constant circulation of ideas advocated by the various tendencies expressed in German-speaking countries [...] derives the fact that artists with affinities for "Symbolism" appeared now in Catholic Bavaria, now in Protestant Prussia."[283]That underlines the specificity of Switzerland, Austria, and Germany in the Symbolist map of Europe. Indeed, Michael Gibson adds that, "There was not, in Germany, this clear religious split which

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[282] The work of Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901) probably shows better than any other the identity crisis which characterised Symbolism in Germany. Even though, from a cultural point of view, he belonged to Germany, after the foundation of the Reich, he left for Italy. As William Vaughan puts it, "This was a self-imposed exile. He resisted attempts to lure him to Germany with official positions. In a sense, however, the creation of the Reich also imposed an exile on him. For he was, after all, Swiss and the Swiss-German community could no longer be considered a part of Germany after 1870" (in Kingdom of the Soul, ed. by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, "Spiritual Landscapes", by William Vaughan, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, p.82).

[283] In Le Symbolisme, by Michael Gibson, Taschen, Paris, 1994, p.125

opposed, for example, Belgium and Holland. There was not either the fight between the Church power and that of the lay Republic which touched France so deeply at the end of that century."[284] A wider questioning about the very identity of the countries affected by the foundation of the Reich had indeed surpassed this matter.

Thus, we have considered through this Symbolist map of Europe that the forms Symbolism took were often based on the traditional religious imagery of the cult that was prevalent before the crisis of faith, and that despite a variety of modes of expression, there was also a consistency in Symbolism across Europe. Indeed, in all cases, it emerged as the result of an upheaval of society when industrialisation developed. The rapid changes in the social, religious, and political structures at the end of the nineteenth century entailed a crisis of faith, and, more generally, a crisis of identity and values. Symbolism, in this context, appeared as a form of idealism whose (sometimes unconscious) aim was to compensate for the feeling of loss. Having tried to show the origins and nature of Symbolism, we now have to study the value myths took for Symbolist artists in this age of upheaval.

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[284] *Ibid.*

c. The Symbolist apprehension of the Myth

"Recent poets have considered myths and legends in a different way. They looked for their permanent significance and ideal meaning; where some saw tales and fables, others saw symbols[...]. A myth is the resounding conch of an idea."

Henri de Régnier.[285]

A crisis of belief, values, and representation: in the context that we have sketched in the previous paragraphs, it is not surprising to observe that Symbolists took a deep interest in myths. The Greek word "mythos", on which was formed the English word "myth", originally means "anything delivered by word of mouth, word, speech".[286] In Sophocles and Euripides, "mythos" means both a saying, a proverb, and the talk of men, the rumour. Traditionally opposed to the word "logos", which also refers to the word, or that by which the inward thought is expressed, we can notice that "mythos", being "delivered [...] by mouth", has a physiological quality. Those elements of definition are not fortuitous, inasmuch as they all underline the idea that the myth is *par excellence* the protean creation of man.

This is why a myth implies a very particular relation to time, which also has tremendous consequences on the Symbolist apprehension of the myth. Since myths are adopted and recreated by each generation, and since it is in the nature of a myth to appear as a palimpsest on which the "fabula" (i.e. the actual material of the story, in its chronological development) would be perpetually rewritten, the origins of myths are impossible to define from a precise historical point of view. As Mircea

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[285] Quoted in De l'Origine des fables, by Fontenelle, Alcan, Paris, 1932, p.42 .My translation.
[286] Definitions from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon

Eliade puts it, "a myth is an account of events which took place *in principio*, that is, 'in the beginning', in a primordial and non-temporal instant, a moment of *sacred time.*"[287] Such a characteristic is fraught with consequences for the artistic choice to make use of a myth, since "in narrating a myth, one reactualises, in some sort, the sacred time in which the events narrated took place.[...] The myth is supposed to happen – if one may say so – in a non-temporal time, in an instant without duration, as certain mystics and philosophers conceived of eternity."[288] We can easily perceive why the sacred aspect of myths particularly appealed to Symbolist artists: since their idealism led them to look for new forms of spirituality, different from that of the Church, myths gave them the possibility to express their longing for what was sacred. We actually have to take into consideration that what they rejected by despising materialism was also, at large, a rejection of the form history took. And, as Mircea Eliade further develops, " the myth takes man out of his own time – his individual, chronological, "historic" time – and projects him, symbolically at least, into the Great Time, into a paradoxical instant which cannot be measured because it does not consist of duration. This is as much as to say that the myth implies a break-away from Time and the surrounding world: it opens up a way into the sacred Great Time."[289] In other words, myths gave Symbolists the ability to escape from history and materialism, they gave them the means to retreat into an ideal world thanks to a particular apprehension of temporality. We could even go further, and put forward the idea that myths also projected Symbolist artists into a new perception of space.

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[287] In Images and Symbols, by Mircea Eliade, translated by Philip Mairet, Harvill Press, London, 1952, 1961, p.57

[288] *Ibid.*, p.57

[289] *Ibid.*, p.57

Indeed, as it is generally accepted today, myths (and not only cosmological myths) often represent natural elements and forces, like the sun, the earth, the moon..., which is to say that the narration of a myth also implies the understanding of the universal cycle, and through its physiological characteristic ("delivered... by mouth"), its appropriation. The myth appears as a unique mode of expression of a world which no longer exists as such: on a temporal and spatial levels, the myth allowed Symbolists to touch base with the "spiritual" world they thought they had lost.

It is important to mention that such a contact was not made through the diachrony of history, but through the synchronic structure and understanding of the myth. What particularly appealed to Symbolist artists was certainly the fact that the myth appeared as a way of reaching totality in a world that, in their eyes, was collapsing and crumbling. According to Françoise Grauby, "the [Symbolist] uses of the myth melt in the same call: that of the past".[290] Through the aspect of totality linked to the myth, Symbolist artists were surely looking for the roots of their culture and spirituality. And in that, "the myth [was] a means to communicate with the past, but, most of all, with the beyond".[291] This is indeed a specificity of Symbolism to associate culture and faith, because the loss of those two was felt by the artists who underwent the "fin de siècle" crisis. As Grauby notes, "the myth is the scene of reconciliation and syncretism [...] [The Symbolist] philosophy does not linger on any ideal of perfection, but on that of totality, which would be a fusion of knowledge and

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[290] In La Création mythique à l'époque du symbolisme : Histoire, analyse et interprétation des mythes fondamentaux du symbolisme, by Françoise Grauby, Nizet, Paris, 1994, p.71

[291] *Ibid.*, p.71

faith".[292] This partly explains why many scholars involved in the Symbolist trend made extensive researches with myths. People like Edouard Schuré, in France, and Cox, in England, undertook such a work in order to highlight correspondences between myths, peoples, and religions, which leads Françoise Grauby to define their research as "anthropological".[293] It is also on this perception of the myth that one of the most important figures for Symbolist artists, Richard Wagner, based his art. In actual fact, what Wagner wanted to reach with his musical dramas was, as Bertrand Marchal puts it, "a collective unconscious".[294] As George Lehmann notes, "[Wagner's music-drama] was total by its virtue of being both mythical and musical: its pure humanity and its extreme generalisation in the hero-legend was intended to give it the widest possible audience – to bring together all humanity, eventually, without regard for race or state."[295] This attempt relied on the power of myths, since, according to Wagner and his acolytes, they were "the natural support of an art based on symbol", and the best way to "make a religious celebration of his dramas".[296] In other words, Wagner wanted to use the totality of the myth to achieve his "*gesamtkunstwerk*".

This leads us to an important point. We have to take the whole measure of what the crisis of values Symbolist artists went through really meant. Indeed, by challenging the entire structure society relied on, Symbolists underlined the fact that their disbelief had reached the level of a crisis of representation. From the moment the

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[292] *Ibid.*, p.71
[293] *Ibid.*, p.71
[294] In Lire le Symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.98
[295] In The Symbolist Aesthetic in France 1885-1895, by A.G. Lehmann, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1950, 1968, p.229
[296] In Lire le Symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.98

structure of society, with, on top of it, God, starts collapsing, "all the religious systems, as well as political, economical, and social ones, are only representations which are based on language. Society, democracy, the Republic are less realities than effects of speech".[297] And, the material of myths being language, we come naturally to this somehow paradoxical conclusion: "[Society, democracy, the Republic] are contemporary mythologies which, like Ancient myths, are nothing but words benefiting from citizen's credulousness".[298] One of the most important figures of French Symbolism, Stéphane Mallarmé, shared this view on myths. According to him, myths were the deepest illusion, and mythology was nothing but an organised speech which had forgotten its original meaning, which had forgotten the significance of words. Mallarmé went as far as saying that " any divinity was nothing but a word which has lost his word memory, its etymology".[299] According to Mallarmé, there was nothing beyond words, which explains his syntactic and neological experiments: poetical creation could only be based on the only tangible material he was in possession of, i.e. words. This is why we can say, with Bertrand Marchal, that "Mallarmé's critique of myths, which dissolves gods in language, joins thus the critique of a poetry which perpetuates outdated myths, together with the illusion of a meaning out of words".[300] It is somehow unsettling to consider the fact that one of the most important Symbolists had such a view on myths, whereas at the same time, myths gave Symbolists the means to express their most vivid concerns. However, the paradox we are encountering here might not be as impenetrable as it seems.

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[297] In Lire le Symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.23
[298] *Ibid.*, p.23
[299] In Lecture de Mallarmé, by Bertrand Marchal, Corti, Paris, 1985, p.173
[300] *Ibid.*, p.173

Although Mallarmé is particularly virulent concerning myths, it is very interesting to see that one of his works, which he regarded as one of his most important pieces, was Hérodiade. Mallarmé's work is not exactly faithful to the myth, since, in the first place, the creature he names so is in fact Salomé.[301] More importantly, what appealed to him in the myth was the name "Hérodiade", and the dream this "dark word, and red, like an open pomegranate",[302] entailed. We can observe, in that, that Mallarmé creates in accordance to his conception of language, and to his famous "il faut céder l'initiative aux mots".[303] Nonetheless, it is worth noticing that amongst all ancient myths, Mallarmé chose to treat what is by far the most popular Symbolist myth, a choice which is surely not accidental. Indeed, in spite of Mallarmé's point of view on myths, their undeniable and fascinating evocative power also appealed to him, which is to say that he too recognised their spiritual power. What he seems to reject, more than mythology, is the scholarly and somehow sclerosed approach to myths, which would consist in reverently considering them as sacred texts, as opposed to the lively evolution and transmission bound to the "mythos". We must mention here that the poetry of the Parnasse, which was the main trend before the appearance of Symbolism, made an extensive and erudite use of mythology, by drawing on its allegories. We can see that despite a common interest in myths, Symbolists and Parnassiens treated them in a totally opposite way. Symbolism was an attempt to create or conjure up what we could call a supra-natural world, a fore-world, through

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[301] Hérodiade, Herod's wife, is in fact Salomé's mother. Mallarmé, by calling Salomé under a different name, certainly wanted to avoid the conjuring up of the dense symbolist imagery attached to Salomé, and all it evoked, namely the sensuality of Salomé's famous dance, and the archetype of the femme fatale.

[302] In a letter to his friend Lefébure, dated from February 1865, in which he rejects all the historical and literary documentation his friend had sent him, saying that he owes his only inspiration to the name "Hérodiade". He adds "I want to make of her a purely dreamt being, absolutely independent from history".

[303] « The initiative must be left to words ». My translation.

the power of evocation, whereas Parnassiens, by using traditional allegories, wanted to produce a learned poetry. In this context, it is worth noticing that the Parnasse school did not use the figure of Prometheus in its poetry, although they used most of the main Greek mythological figures. The Symbolist Mockel, who theorised Symbolism more than he actually created, gives us an element to explain this surprising observation.

In Propos de literature,[304] Mockel actually made an attempt to compare allegory and symbol, in order to show the power of the latter, in the art Symbolists were ambitious to produce. Mockel thus establishes the following points: "The allegory would be the explicit or analytical representation, through an image, of a PRECONCEIVED abstract idea; it would also be conventional – and in that explicit – of that idea, as we can see with the attributes of heroes, gods, godesses, who in a way are the labels of that convention. On the contrary the symbol implies the intuitive search for various ideal elements scattered in forms".[305] After those essential elements of definition, Mockel gives a very interesting example in order to establish the difference between the two tropes: "Ceres, Vulcan, are allegorical characters; the attributes explaining them are true emblems since, without their conventional meaning, Ceres and Vulcan would not be more than an ordinary blacksmith and a woman crowned with spikes. But a poet or a sculptor translating the Prometheus myth, would easily make a symbolic work of it; since Prometheus stealing the fire, Prometheus bound, can

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[304] *Propos de littérature* (1894), by A. Mockel, republished in Esthétique du Symbolisme, Bruxelles, Palais des Académies, 1962

[305] *Ibid.*, p.85

entirely express himself through his only attitude".[306] Although Mockel does not precisely explain why Prometheus appears to him as "symbolic material", and not like a simple thief, or a torch bearer, or even a tortured man, the comparison he draws between allegorical mythological figures and the Titan is sufficient to give us an insight on why Parnassiens did not choose to develop the Prometheus figure. Prometheus, by that time, had inspired so many giants of European literature that he had already reached the status of a symbol, whose artistic interpretation was constantly moving. Moreover, Prometheus was epitomising mankind at that stage of the evolution of the myth, and therefore could not find his place in the Greek pantheon, which was so dear to the Parnassiens' hearts. Prometheus' status is ambiguous, and the interest Symbolist artists took in him is surely linked to the ambivalence they felt. Even if Prometheus represents mankind, its suffering, and also its glory, and even if his becoming man appears as a conquest in the evolution of the myth, the Titan's origins cannot be totally erased. And Prometheus' double nature, in this context, is of great interest to us.

Indeed, the Symbolist choice of myths is certainly not a matter of chance. In order to understand why, we have to come back briefly to a point we mentioned earlier in this chapter, which is the fact that Symbolists had pushed the examination of their sensitivity and moods even further than the Romantics. They actually pushed it so far that it appeared as an exercise in dissection bound to discouragement. The fin de siècle crisis had actually reached the Symbolists' psyche, and instead of finding certainties, unity, and a solid rational ground through the examination of their

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[306] *Ibid.*, p.87

sensitivity, Symbolists only discovered another reason for doubting. As Bertrand Marchal puts it, "the omnipresence of the soul in Symbolist poetry refers less to a spiritual or sentimental principle [which could have been the case with Romanticism] than to a strange and sometimes disquieting reality perceived at the depth of oneself".[307] The fragmentation they saw everywhere around them was also present in themselves.[308] We must actually remember, with Bertrand Marchal, that "a certain Symbolism thus discovers the inside space, explores this new reality the fin de siècle psychology now named the Unconscious, and which [...] can only be phrased in the language of the image, in poetry".[309] Such an observation is important in the perspective of the Symbolist apprehension of myths (and especially in that of the Prometheus myth, as we shall see), since it appears that the great Symbolist myths show a sort of fascination for "otherness" (which is also another way to define the Unconscious). In actual fact, it seems that Symbolists were drawn to myths involving creatures which were neither entirely human, nor absolutely transcendent. This could prove to be an important key to understanding the Symbolist interest in the Prometheus myth.

Indeed, the most famous characters of the Symbolist mythology have in common an irreducible mysterious quality, which mainly relies on the fact that something uncanny makes them both human and inhuman. As Françoise Grauby puts it, with "Salomé, the androgyne, the sphinx, three different lights are shed on the woman, the disquieting creature, the monster and the animal in us. Those beings, who are only

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[307] In Lire le symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.17

[308] This is probably in this light that we have to understand Arthur Rimbaud's famous "Je est un autre", "I is another".

[309] In Lire le symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.17

loosely linked to mankind, show that the centre of interest shifted".[310] This shift can actually easily be explained by the disturbing discovery of the Unconscious, and, therefore, by the very presence of the otherness in oneself. Françoise Grauby tries to highlight the main difference between the Romantic and Symbolist mythologies by emphasising the fact that the Romantic mythology was that of man, whereas the Symbolist "(was) not interested in the individual perceived as a productive being anymore".[311] However, if we examine the main Symbolist figures named above by Françoise Grauby, it is interesting to see that, although they are not human beings as such, they all have human qualities: those myths "have kept a few human behaviours while staying out of mankind. The myths do not exalt superhuman heroes, and do not condemn monsters either. They are just one of the possible aspects of mankind...".[312]

In other words, Symbolist artists favoured myths which reflected the ambiguity and mystery of the human psyche, and their disquieting feeling facing the discovery of this "unknown territory". Interestingly, Symbolist artists focused their attention on characters taken in a tragic conflict, and the human side of these creatures essentially relied on this tragic quality. Narcissus, the main Symbolist mask of the androgyne, has to face the impossible fulfilment of his love; the femme fatale, under the features of Salomé or Medea, has to kill to satisfy her passion; and the Sphinx was treated by Symbolists as a chimera, who, as a mermaid, was in fact another femme fatale. Thus, we can see that the main Symbolist characters are linked to mankind because of the nature of their passions, even if they are too great to be human. And this is because

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[310] In La Création mythique à l'époque du symbolisme : Histoire, analyse et interprétation des mythes fondamentaux du symbolisme, by Françoise Grauby, Nizet, Paris, 1994, p.21
[311] *Ibid.*, p.21
[312] *Ibid.*, p.21

those passions lead them to an irreducible conflict that they are quintessentially tragic characters.

If we apply all the characteristics of Symbolist characters as detailed above to Prometheus, we can understand why he deeply inspired Symbolist artists. Prometheus, more than any other character, had this tragic quality which appealed so much to Symbolists. This was certainly inherited from Æschylus' and Shelley's dramas, but the very nature of the Prometheus myth already contained all the elements to make a tragedy of it. Indeed, the myth is essentially, and originally, on the supreme conflict between Prometheus and the Olympian gods. However, with the evolution of the myth, the essence of the agôn was not hubris anymore, but the injustice of the gods. The Titan was not the black sheep amongst gods: the conflict was now between mankind and gods, which is to say between two sets of values and two different conceptions of the world. The myth had evolved so much that by taking the side of men, it looked as if Prometheus' choice also implied that of his "identity", human or godlike. This leads us to an important point. Prometheus might appear as the Symbolist myth *par excellence,* precisely because of his double nature. He epitomises mankind, but his godlike origins remain, since they give the Titan's acts all their value and significance. He represents mankind, or, to be more precise, its greatness, and for this reason, he is above human nature. He is a symbol and an archetype. In this respect, the fascination of otherness could not have been greater than it is in the character of Prometheus, who is so close to man, whose tragic sufferance is the greatest, and who is also so far above mankind. The ambiguity of Prometheus being bottomless, it exalted the Symbolist interest in the otherness.

To conclude this section, it seems that his duality defined the two different existing attitudes towards Prometheus in the context of this crisis of faith. The first one consisted in exalting his human side, and the second in exalting his sacred side. Furthermore, the perception of Prometheus during the fin de siècle period appears as a reflection of the general religious questioning, which was not fortuitous. During the fin de siècle period, the history of the Prometheus myth met history itself, and the reality of the religious crisis. The Prometheus symbol was fed by the richness and significance acquired by the myth throughout its history.

2. *"The Twilight of the Gods"*

In order to understand why the history of the myth entered into conjunction with history itself at the end of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to come back briefly to the turning point of the Prometheus myth that we mentioned earlier, which is to say to Goethe. Indeed, it is mainly thanks to the German writer that the Prometheus myth reached a crucial point: the Titan became a man, and, perhaps even more importantly, the mythological character became a symbol of mankind, of their suffering, and nobility. However, the impact that Goethe's works on Prometheus had on the myth and the perception of the Titan had even deeper consequences. Indeed, Prometheus claimed that he equalled the gods with his creative power, he denounced their injustice, implied that men themselves created their gods, and, most of all, put wisdom and Reason (Minerva) on the side of mankind. Man was therefore "freed from God", since, to a certain extent, He was the creation of man. Although Goethe himself did not go as far as announcing the death of God, this is nonetheless what his

two Prometheus lead to, and it is not surprising to notice the great influence they had on philosophers, the most important being Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Although it is not chronologically coherent, we shall examine Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of the Prometheus myth before that of Marx, because the importance of Prometheus was greater in his work than in that of Marx, and because Nietzsche can be regarded as a Symbolist philosopher.

a. The Era of Mankind

"If I speak of Plato, Pascal, Spinoza, and Goethe, I know that their blood runs in mine"

Friedrich Nietzsche[313]

Friedrich Nietzsche

It is important to take into consideration Nietzsche's writings on Prometheus, inasmuch as the Greek figure was of great importance in his thought, a thought that remarkably analyses the turmoil of the fin de siècle. In this respect, his interpretation of Prometheus certainly sheds light on the way the Titan might have been perceived during the later years of the nineteenth century, especially in Germany. We already have, in the second chapter, briefly mentioned Nietzsche's enthusiasm for Goethe's famous poem.

But Nietzsche's interest in Prometheus was more than admiration for Goethe or Æschylus. Although Prometheus is rarely presented as a major figure in Nietzsche's work, he nonetheless made recurrent apparitions in crucial passages of the

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[313] In Some Aspects of the Life and Work of Nietzsche, and particularly of His Connection with Greek Literature and Thought, by A.H.J. Knight, Russell and Russell, New York, 1933, 1967, p.8

philosopher's works. It is first interesting to note, that, from an early age, Nietzsche had shown a particular interest in the Titan: when he was fifteen years old, he actually wrote a play entitled Prometheus. Even if The Birth of Tragedy (1872) was his first philosophical work to be published, we can observe that Prometheus had haunted Nietzsche's pen before, in a piece of work that was probably the first to be completed. Even more stimulating is the fact that, when The Birth of Tragedy was about to be published, Nietzsche proved to be particularly enthusiastic about the vignette that he decided to put on the cover of his work. The vignette in question was not a representation of Dionysos, as might have been expected, and nor was it one of Apollo, Nietzsche chose a vignette representing Prometheus. In late November 1871, Friedrich Nietzsche sent his editor E.W. Fritzsch an illustration of Prometheus by Leopold Rau, who was another friend of his. Nietzsche considered it a masterpiece, and the dedication he wrote in the copy of The Birth of Tragedy that he offered to Richard Wagner clearly proves that he took great pride in his book, in the vignette affixed on it, and in the fact that The Birth of Tragedy was written under the Titan's sway: "I am picturing to myself, my venerated friend, the moment when you received my book. I can see you returning from some walk in the snow, on a winter evening, contemplating the Prometheus Unbound of the vignette, reading my name, and you being already persuaded that, whatever the content of this work, the author has deep and impressive things to say...".[314] Because of the importance he gave to Leopold Rau's vignette and to its function on the cover of the first edition of The Birth of Tragedy, we have to be very careful not to neglect the value the Prometheus figure

[314] Quoted in Prométhée, Faust, Frankenstein, Fondements imaginaires de l'éthique, by Dominique Lecourt, Flore de poche, Paris, 1996, p.152. My translation.

had for Nietzsche. We therefore need to examine its role in The Birth of Tragedy, as well as to interpret its recurrence in later works, inasmuch as Nietzsche's interest in Prometheus was to last.

Firstly, it is worth noticing that, in The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche perceives in a very clear way what is at stake in the evolution of the Prometheus myth, before dealing with Prometheus' persona as such. Indeed, by taking into account the treatment of the myth by Æschylus and Goethe, what he extracts from his observation is the revolution introduced by Goethe in his interpretation of the myth:

"What the thinker Æschylus had to say to us here, but what as a poet he only allows us to sense in his symbolic image, the youthful Goethe was able to reveal to us in the audacious words of his Prometheus:

'Here I sit, forming men

In my own image,

A race to be like me,

To suffer, to weep,

To delight and to rejoice,

And to defy you,

As I do.'

Man, rising to Titanic stature, gains culture by his own efforts and forces the gods to enter into an alliance with him because, in his very own wisdom, he holds their existence and their limitations in his hands."[315] What Nietzsche implies is that the myth, as treated by Æschylus, already potentially contained Prometheus' embodiment

[315] In The Birth of Tragedy, by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1967, p.69

of mankind, although the German writer was the first to reveal it fully. In other words, Goethe allowed the birth of the Promethean man. Because Nietzsche perceived the value of Prometheus' persona in the context of the myth's history, the way in which he apprehended Prometheus' manhood was as a conquest, and therefore as a victory against God. This special focus on Prometheus surely conditioned the deep interest he took in the Titan, who soon became a model for Nietzsche, on different grounds.

One of the main characteristics of Prometheus in Nietzsche's works is that he appears as the model of what the philosopher calls active sin, as opposed to the Judeo-Christian passivity, which he abhorred so much. This element of Prometheus' persona is already present in The Birth of Tragedy:

"The Prometheus story is an original possession of the entire Aryan[316] community of people and evidences their gift for the profoundly tragic. Indeed, it does not seem improbable that this myth has the same characteristic significance for the Aryan character which the myth of the fall has for the Semitic character, and that these are related to each other like brother and sister".[317] Indeed, Nietzsche puts forward the idea that primitive men, because of the power of fire and what it involved, felt guilty for disposing freely of fire. The fire, if not "a present from heaven, either as a lightning bolt or as the warming rays of the sun", was surely the fruit of "a robbery of

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[316] We must be extremely cautious with the meaning that Nietzsche gave to this term, especially in its opposition to "Semitic", and always keep in mind that the unfortunate use of this terminology by the nazis should not affect our reading of the philosopher's writings, who always loathed anti-Semitism.

[317] *Ibid.*, p.70 ; this idea is nonetheless recurrent in Nietzsche's work. See, for example, in The Will to Power, by Nietzsche, ed. by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1968, p.445: "The idealisation of the man of *great sacrilege* (a sense of his greatness) is Greek; depreciation, slandering, contempt for the sinner is Judeo-Christian."

divine nature".[318] Indeed, the Prometheus myth being an explanation of the end of the golden age, it appears as the equivalent of the biblical myth of the fall. However, because of the notion of "active sin" as described above by Nietzsche, the myth, with Goethe, became that of a liberation and a rebirth, rather than that of a loss. This allows us to understand why, in Nietzsche's perspective of freeing man from his chimeras, the figure of Prometheus appeared as a fundamental model for mankind.[319] There is a second very important point concerning Prometheus, as presented by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy: the fact that he is not, so to speak, an isolated figure. Indeed, Prometheus is presented as a "mask of Dionysos", who was so important in the philosopher's thought, and who also appeared, as we shall see, under other features. Nietzsche establishes such a link between the two Greek characters: "The Titanic impulse to become, as it were, the Atlas for all individuals, carrying them on a broad back, higher and higher, farther and farther, is what the Promethean and the Dionysian have in common. In this respect, the Prometheus of Æschylus is a Dionysian mask".[320] Many commentators have emphasised the fact that, in his writings and letters (included those preceding Nietzsche's fall into total insanity) the philosopher associated and even superimposed Dionysos onto Zarathustra, which would allow us to put forward the idea that Prometheus was part of the same lineage in Nietzsche's thought, and which also confirms that the Titan was a constant model and inspiration for Nietzsche.

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[318] *Ibid.*, p.70

[319] Prometheus was the perfect emblem of the thought of a philosopher, who, at the back of the original edition of The Gay Science, 14 years after *The Birth of Tragedy*, wrote: "This book marks the conclusion of a series of writings by Friedrich Nietzsche, whose common goal is to erect *a new image and ideal of the free spirit*".

[320] In The Birth of Tragedy, by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1967, p.72

However, Prometheus reappeared in Nietzsche's work in a more definite and decisive way, as he is presented as a prototype of the superman. In The Will to Power, Nietzsche explains that society had reached a point at which the "tools" (men) it needed for it to function in an optimal way was a new model of man. As Nietzsche puts it, "The increasing dwarfing of man is precisely the driving force that brings to mind the breeding of a stronger race – a race that would be excessive precisely where the dwarfed species was weak and growing weaker (in will, responsibility, self-assurance, ability to posit goals for oneself)".[321] In the two following fragments, Nietzsche describes what the qualities of the new model of man are, as opposed to the characteristics of the current majority, and it is at that stage that Prometheus makes a reappearance: "Our psychologists, whose glance lingers involuntarily on symptoms of Decadence alone, again and again induce us to mistrust the spirit. One always sees only those effects of the spirit that make men weak, delicate, and morbid; but now they are coming: new barbarians { cynics; experimenters; conquerors} union of spiritual superiority with well-being and an excess of strength".[322] We recognise here the attributes of the man Nietzsche will later name "superman". The philosopher then carries on his explanations and makes the link between those attributes and the Titan himself: "I point to something new: certainly for such a democratic type there exists the danger of the barbarian, but one has looked for it only in the depths. There exists also another type of barbarian, who comes from the heights: a species of conquering and ruling natures in search of material to mould. Prometheus was this

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[321] In The Will to Power, by Friedrich Nietzsche, edited by Walter Kaufmann, translated by Walter Kauflann and Hollingdale, R.J., Vintage Books, New York, 1968, fragment 898, pp.477-478
[322] *Ibid.*, fragment 899, p.478

kind of barbarian".[323] In this respect, we can see that although the figure of Prometheus never appears as a central one in any of Nietzsche's works, it is nonetheless omnipresent, and essential in what it represents. As truly as Goethe gave birth to the Promethean man, Nietzsche uses the Titan as a model for mankind to follow. He wants to make of a symbol and an emblem a model *in praxis*. Men had to get rid of their chimeras (God and "morality" being the two most important according to Nietzsche), and only have faith in themselves and their creative power in order to inaugurate a new era in which man would be his own dignified master.

This brief examination of Nietzsche is certainly essential if we consider his enormous impact on German Symbolist artists. Indeed, nearly all the most important German sculptors and painters devoted one of their works to Nietzsche – Max Klinger,[324] Curt Stoeving, and Karl Donnorf[325] all made a bust of Nietzsche – or of a particular aspect of his works, as we shall see in a later chapter on the German Symbolist interpretation of Prometheus. Nietzsche's philosophy played an important part in the perception of Prometheus, but we also have to take into account the fact that another extremely influential German philosopher, Karl Marx, used Prometheus to embody one of his most important ideas, an interpretation which was not without consequences for the evolution of the myth.

- *Karl Marx*

Although Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx developed a very different philosophy, and although the ways in which they structured their thought had not much in

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[323] *Ibid.*, Fragment 900, pp.478-479
[324] Friedrich Nietzsche, by Max Klinger, bust in bronze, 1902-1903, Museum der Bidenden künste Leipzig
[325] Bust of Nietzsche, by Karl Donnorf, 1901-1902, Plaster of Paris Weimar, Stiftung Weimarer Klassik, Nietzsche-Archiv

common, it is fascinating to note that both took a great interest in the Prometheus myth, and that their perception of the Titan shared many similarities, amongst which was the fact that both took him as a model for mankind. However, before emphasising the consistency of Prometheus' persona as perceived by the German world, we first have to show the specificity of Marx's perception of Prometheus in a work which, like that of Nietzsche, was his first philosophical work: his doctoral dissertation. Written between 1840 and March 1841 (Marx was only 23 years old when he finished his PhD), his doctorate was entitled "Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean philosophy of Nature". It is probably necessary, before the examination of his foreword and of perception of Prometheus, to say a few words about what led him to evoke the figure of the Titan.

One of the aims of Marx's doctoral dissertation was to rehabilitate Epicurus, whose philosophy, until then, had been considered as similar to that of Democritus, but of inferior quality. Such a defence of Epicurus was largely justified by the fact that Marx in sympathy with the thought of the ancient philosopher. Indeed, on the question of Nature and its laws, Marx tried to prove that, as H.P.Adams puts it, "Epicurus, and indeed, earlier thinkers, had shown that the planets were not gods but merely collections of atoms",[326] an idea that has fundamental consequences, and which explains Marx's interest in Epicurus' philosophy. Indeed, as Adams continues, "But how shake off the inexorable laws, which are the first, the 'naïve' form in which reason embodies itself in phenomena? Here we reach the ultimate crisis of the dialectical progress, and here Epicurus-Marx recurs to the fundamental doctrine of

[326] In Karl Marx in his Earlier Writings, by H.P. Adams, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1940, p.37

'abstract possibility', which is nothing short of the dogmatic assertion that whatever is could be otherwise",[327] which brings us to one of the central points, if not the central point of Marx's philosophy: "The human mind, armed with this medusa-shield of its own self-consciousness in which Nature's independence is reflected and overcome, thus vindicates its own absolute freedom and security. The victory makes us equal to the gods".[328] Although his doctoral dissertation was his first work, we can see that Marx's essential idea of the supremacy of human consciousness, which later led him to analyse and denounce man's alienation, was already present here, and was already crucial. So crucial, in fact, that Marx's foreword to "Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean philosophy of Nature" already makes the attention of his readers focus on this question, through his evocation of Prometheus. Indeed, the latter appears as an illustration of the rejection of Plutarch's famous dictum: "[bringing] philosophy before the forum of religion". After this, Marx introduces a quotation by Hume, and, eventually, Prometheus' lines from Æschylus' play.

The first important point to make about Marx's perception of Prometheus, as opposed to that of Nietzsche, is that, even though he too recognised Prometheus as a very important figure, Marx quoted Æschylus and not Goethe in order to develop his thoughts. However, if we examine the texts in question, Marx seems to have read Æschylus after Goethe, and, without any doubt, it was Goethe's Prometheus rather than Prometheus Bound which had the larger influence on his thought, even if he does not admit it. It must actually be borne in mind that, according to the young Marx, Goethe was too conservative to be a point of reference. Indeed, I mentioned in

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[327] *Ibid.*, p.37
[328] *Ibid.*

the second main chapter, when writing of Goethe, that during his long life, his opinions, and especially his conception of God and the Absolute, evolved and changed. That explains the abundant literature and frequent disagreements about this burning question. However, Goethe's works on Prometheus clearly claimed predominance for the "Genius" over the Olympian gods, which gave full impetus to the perception of Prometheus as man, rather than God. Marx nevertheless had a deep knowledge of Goethe's writings, and he quoted from him on several occasions.[329] However, because of his mixed feelings of admiration and disagreement, Marx decided to quote Æschylus rather than Goethe to evoke the Titan.

Marx puts Prometheus' words into the mouth of a personified, if not deified, Philosophy, a process we shall have to comment on. After the violent criticism of Plutarch, Marx carries on: "Philosophy, as long as a drop of blood shall pulse in its world-subduing and absolutely free heart, will never grow tired of answering its adversaries with the cry of Epicurus: 'Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them, is truly impious'.[330] Philosophy makes no secret of it."[331] It is at that point that Marx, or should we rather say Philosophy, makes use of Prometheus' credo: " In one word, I feel hatred for all the gods",[332] which is in fact a compression of lines 974

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[329] See, for example, Debates on the law on Thefts of Wood, in Collected Works, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, volume I, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p.246, and, in the same volume, Debates on the Freedom of the Press, p.137. However, a sign of his (secret?) admiration for Goethe is also is mixed attitude towards him: see the satirical poem he wrote about him, "False Wandering Years", pp.578-580.

[330] In Greek in Karl Marx's doctoral dissertation.

[331] In Collected Works, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, volume I Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p.30

[332] In Greek in Karl Marx's doctoral dissertation. See Collected Works, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, volume I, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p.30. For more consistency, I am giving Philip Vellacott's translation of Prometheus Bound.

and 975[333] of Prometheus Bound by Æschylus, to which Karl Marx added, "[This] confession of Prometheus is its own confession, its own aphorism against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity. It will have none other beside".[334] We can notice that Marx's use and analysis of this quotation allows him to introduce an explanation of why he chose to compare the philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus, i.e. to declare the idea that human self-consciousness is above everything, including God (or the gods). In such a context, Marx's personified Philosophy appears as the representative of the free man, free because he makes use of his freedom and self-consciousness to think.

The philosopher then quotes Æschylus anew, with Prometheus' answer to Hermes:

I would not change my painful plight

On any terms, for your servile humility.

Being bondslave to this rock is preferable, no doubt,

To being the trusted messenger of Zeus, your father.

These are lines 965 to 968, even though the last two are in fact sarcastic in the mouth of Hermes[335] in the original text, and not another provocation from Prometheus. It is interesting to notice that the "discreet" condensation (in the first quotation) and correction (in the above quotation) of Æschylus' play emphasise the revolutionary aspect of Prometheus, and could very well disguise an attempt to give a Goethean coloration to his references. Indeed, Goethe's Prometheus fragment in particular

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[333] - In one word, I detest all gods who could repay/ My benefits with such outrageous infamy", in Prometheus Bound by Æschylus, translated with an introduction by Philip Vellacott, Penguin Books, London, 1961, p.49

[334] In Collected Works, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, volume I, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p.30

[335] In Philip Vellacott's translation quoted above, line 967 was translated in that way: "To being the trusted messenger of Father Zeus", p.49

would have given the same weight to Karl Marx's words and interpretation of the Titan's opposition to the Olympian gods.

In this, the specificity of Marx's interpretation of Prometheus is that the Titan's claim that he despises the gods, and therefore belongs to mankind, relies on the fact that self-consciousness, understood as the most precious possible attribute, is properly human. Prometheus' manhood stems from his embodiment, in Marx's foreword, of the power of human self-consciousness. Thus, for Marx, Prometheus' attitude appears as an invitation for man to make full use of his self-consciousness. In that, he is presented by the German philosopher as a symbol and model for mankind. A drawing of Marx represented as Prometheus (Fig. 8), published in 1842[336] to criticize the censorship of his articles for The Reinische Zeitung, tends to prove how influential his interpretation of the Titan was.

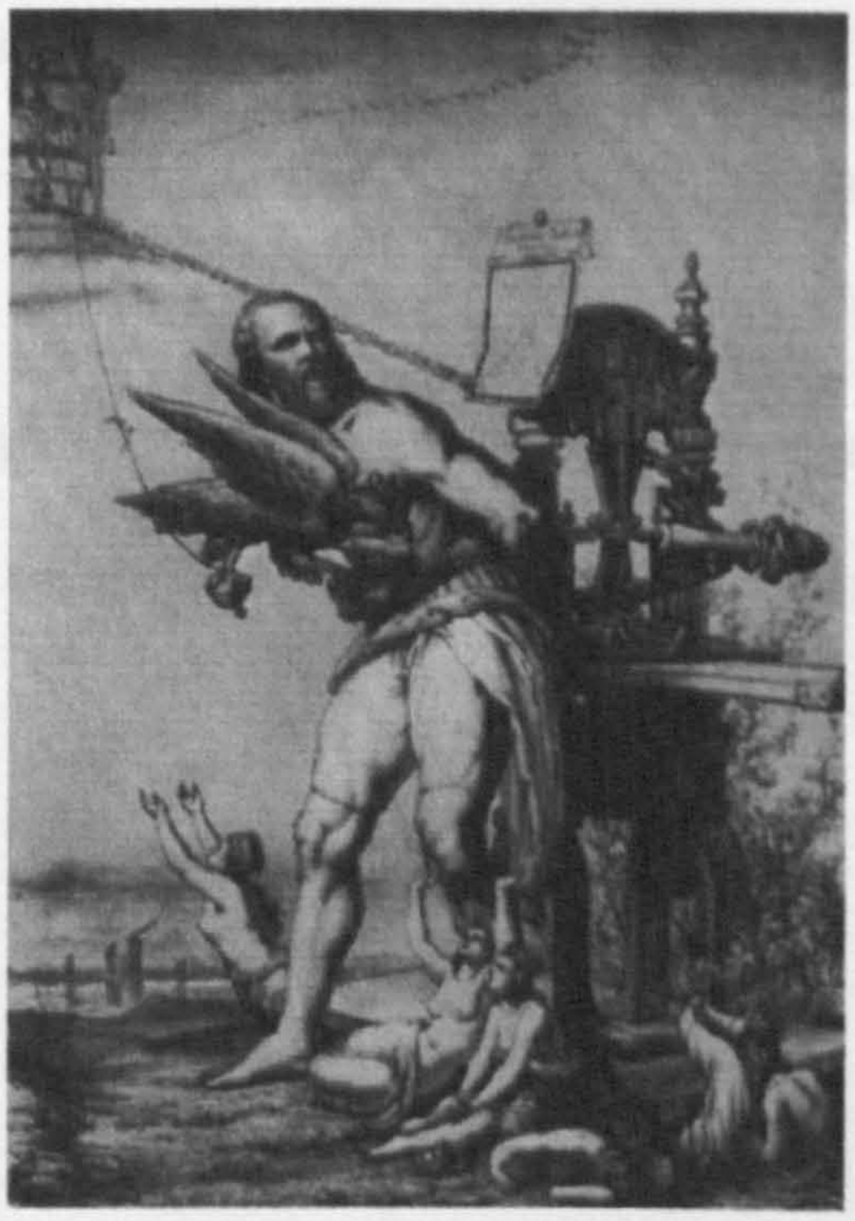

Fig.8

[336] Prometheus Bound (1842), anonymous

Marx concludes his foreword with a provoking "Prometheus is the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar",[337] since, as opposed to Plutarch, Philosophy and mankind must not be evaluated in comparison to religion or gods. It is probably of interest to mention that, later in the twentieth century, the figure of Prometheus took on an important significance in communist imagery, especially in Russia, becoming a sort of variation on Stakhanov, the archetype of the worker. However, we shall not elaborate on that point, since the examination of this aspect is not part of our subject of study.[338] During the period we are interested in, the transposition of Marx's theories into the political world had not yet occurred, and in this respect, his ideas did not have the deep impact that they had later. Moreover, Marx's doctoral dissertation was far from being the most influential text of the German philosopher. However, it is important to mention the value Marx gave to the figure of Prometheus inasmuch as, together with that of Nietzsche, it appears symptomatic of German thought during the second half of the nineteenth century. In order to understand the value of Prometheus' representations in the German world, especially in the pictorial field, we now have to synthesise and examine in a larger context what is revealed by Marx's and Nietzsche's perceptions of Prometheus.

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[337] In Collected Works, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, volume I, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p.31

[338] About the development of this aspect of Prometheus, refer to Theodore Ziolkowski's excellent The Sin of Knowledge. Ancient Themes and Modern Variations, Princeton University, Princeton, 2000

b. German Thought and the Birth of Vitalist Prometheus

If we consider the two interpretations of the Prometheus myth we have just examined, that of Marx and that of Nietzsche, it appears that Prometheus, according to the two philosophers, represented more than a symbol for mankind. Following Goethe, Marx and Nietzsche did not make Prometheus a symbol for human suffering. On the other hand, like Goethe, they chose to highlight the nobility of mankind in Prometheus by emphasising the rebellious aspect of his persona. However, whereas Prometheus' harangue against the Olympian gods, in Æschylus' play, had a tone both desperate and resolute, the two German philosophers made of Prometheus the model of a conqueror who overcame his own chimeras. In Goethe's fragment and in the Prometheus ode, the Titan, thanks to his genius and creative powers, can equal gods, and actually equals them by choosing his human side. But this implies that gods are still ruling. Marx's and Nietzsche's interpretations of Prometheus derive from Goethe's, but the common ground of their thoughts on the value and meaning of Prometheus' act, implied by Marx and claimed by Nietzsche, is that gods are products of the human mind, and that the awakening of self-consciousness is the real issue in the myth. The theme of transgression is replaced by that of man's realisation and awareness of his own powers. In this respect, Prometheus appears as an entirely positive character.

It is remarkable to see that Nietzsche used Prometheus to illustrate the idea of "active sin", inasmuch as this concept suppresses the guilt accompanying the biblical original sin or the loss of the golden age. Given this change of perspective, Prometheus is entirely freed from the rampant idea that he was responsible for the origin of human

misery and for Pandora's mischief. This is even truer of Marx's perception of the Titan, as he does not even evoke any aspect of the myth of the fall. Indeed, it seems that, according to Marx, the acceptance of Prometheus as a model of self-consciousness coincides with the original acceptance of man for what he really is, i.e. a potential free being. In this respect, for Marx and Nietzsche, Prometheus' opposition to gods would appear as a symbolic scene of the moment at which man realises that, thanks to his conscience, he is an autonomous and free being, with his own ability to create. In this context, Prometheus seems to be presented as the model of a new man, born without the weight of the original sin, and with an infinite number of possibilities offered to his creative and mental powers. This new German interpretation of Prometheus was that of a rebirth for man, on this new basis.

We understand why, in the German context of the newly created Reich – relying on the dream of a strong and united Germany – this perception of the Prometheus myth was developed. The rebirth of man through the example of Prometheus was equalled by the (hoped for) rebirth of Germany, which never before had a real geographical and political consistency. Although the expectations of Germans were later deceived, their hope in a rejuvenated Germany found a direct expression in pictorial art, which created an imagery of Arcadia, and a fantasy of a new eternal golden age. Nature, athletic bodies, often nudes, and scenes from classical mythology were exalted for their vitalism. The works of Hans Von Marées, Max Beckmann, and Ludwig Von Hoffmann, in this respect, are surely the most representative of this idealisation of the golden age. The paintings of Arnold Böcklin, peopled with fauns and representations of Pan, also reflect the vitalism which spread in German art during the second half of

the nineteenth century. His fascinating interpretation of Prometheus will be the subject of a further chapter.

Through the examination of Nietzsche's and Marx's interpretations of Prometheus, we have been led to consider the fact that the crisis of faith which spread in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century took a special form in Germany, and that the very perception of Prometheus was affected by it. Indeed, in the very particular cultural and political context of the Reich, it seems that hope, rather than being directed towards religion, turned towards man and his potential, which explains why, in Prometheus' double nature, earthly and godly, his belonging to mankind was emphasised, and why he was presented as a model for man. However, in most of the rest of Europe, his godlike nature was also to play an important part.

As an answer to the crisis of faith, it could be said that the Symbolist tendency, in German-speaking countries, was to proclaim that religion had only been a step within the evolution of mankind, who was now freed from chimeras and from the burden of original sin. It was ready to enter the era of its full achievement. In this respect, they did not entirely deplore the destruction of the ancient order, since they considered that what was felt as a new historical period was in fact stemming from the end of that structure. The only difference was that their faith was placed in man, and not upon God. However, another Symbolist attitude was to indirectly go back to what they had lost, that is to say God or the Absolute. Such an approach implied an attempt to rebuild a form of religion, based on what they had previously known. It could actually be said that, whereas, in German-speaking countries, most Symbolist artists turned towards an idealised golden age to emulate the great powers of man, in the

rest of Europe, Symbolists generally attempted to recreate a meaningful world, in which a supernatural principle, and not man, was central. Applied to the myth of Prometheus, it is therefore not surprising to consider that this other Symbolist reaction to the crisis of faith coincided with an emphasis on Prometheus' divine origins.

3. *Prometheus at the Heart of the Symbolist Syncretism*

a. Re-establishing a World order

Although different Symbolist reactions occurred facing the fin de siècle crisis, this did not imply that they excluded each other, or were antagonistic. As well as the specific German answer to the crisis of faith, one of the Symbolist attitudes towards the spiritual turmoil artists went through was to point out the state of dereliction of the world, often in a cynical way, which was therefore commonly called "Decadent". However, another Symbolist reaction, truly idealistic, was the conception and creation of a new world order to replace the structure of values and beliefs that had disappeared. In this respect, where German Symbolism had tried to move forward by claiming that the new era was that of mankind, this other trend of Symbolism tried to re-establish a world order, consciously or unconsciously based on the Judeo-Christian one.

Indeed, what appeared as the essence of this new world was the notion of the Absolute, which they felt so deprived of in the turmoil of this crisis. Most Symbolist artists actually had a Christian sensitivity which they retained, and which re-emerged

in their works of art. However, at first it was inconceivable to them[339] to base a new world and aesthetic on the religion whose very collapse brought with it the meaning of society. They rejected the dogmas of religion, but kept its poetical aspect. They rejected the Church, but were bound to spirituality. The element they retained from religion was its transcendency together with the unequalled beauty and evocative power of its symbols. They sought the Absolute, which explains why Symbolism raised art to the level of religion. This is what one of the main reference for Symbolists, Richard Wagner, noted when he said: "One might say that when religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for art to save the spirit of religion by recognising the figurative value of the mythic symbols which the former would have us believe in their literal sense and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal representation".[340] Symbolist artists actually "saved the spirit of religion", by creating a new form of art based on their very own syncretism, made of myths and symbols of very different origin.

To appreciate the coherence of this syncretism, we have to remember that the ground of Symbolism was the religious nature of art. Indeed, these artists based their art on symbols, because, to them, this form of expression was the only one which could designate the hidden truth and meaning of the world behind its immediate perception. We mentioned earlier that language appeared as a part of, and as a reflection of the general structure of society. But with the disappearance of the values which sustained and justified this very same structure, language itself appeared as a

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339 Some symbolist artists eventually returned to their original faith.
340 In Religion and Art, by Richard Wagner, Prose Works, volume VI, translated by Ashton Ellis, London, 1897.

delusion. Hence the unique language introduced by Symbolist poets like Mallarmé, who attempted to create a new language, based on a musical use of syntax, the use of rare words often chosen for their evocative sound rather than for their meaning, and most of all, the use of symbols. Indeed, the symbol appeared as a privileged means to reach the truth and Absolute behind the apparent reality, because it is in essence suggestive. As Mockel puts it, " the symbol implies the intuitive search for the various scattered ideal elements in forms",[341] which is to say that the symbol relies on an active participation of the reader, who, as an initiate, has to discover the ideal world suggested by symbols.

In this context, the role of the artist was to reveal the superior kingdom Symbolism was aspiring to. As Dorothy Kosinski puts it, "The artist is capable of deciphering the hieroglyphs of this world, of penetrating the mysterious truth of the ideal realm, and of communicating the hidden correspondences between the two realities in a universal language of symbols".[342] This leads her to name the Symbolist artist "the artist-priest".[343] Indeed, a kind of supernatural function is ascribed to him, inasmuch as he gives expression to the Absolute. Taking the example of Mallarmé to underline the specificity of Symbolist artists, Dorothy Kosinski highlights the fact that "Mallarmé departs from the Romantic tradition of the poet who expresses personal emotions which he sees reverberate in nature. Instead, the Poet is the mouthpiece or medium for the divine truth which finds expression in the chastened purity of the

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[341] In *Propos de littérature* (1894), by A. Mockel, Esthétique du Symbolisme, Palais des académies, Bruxelles, 1962, p.85, my translation

[342] In Orpheus in Nineteenth Century Symbolism, by Dorothy M. Kosinski, U.M.I Research Press-Ann Arbor, London, 1989, p.67

[343] *Ibid.*, p.69

work".[344] All those elements tend to show that Symbolism appeared as a religion, the poets playing the part of priests by revealing the ideal behind reality, and the notion of the Absolute, traditionally represented by God, being replaced by that of Beauty. In spite of a shift from established religions and dogmas, the sacred was at the very heart of Symbolism, and, to a large extent, founded it. Furthermore, this form of spirituality, which considered Beauty as the ideal, as the primary principle, gave coherence to the Symbolist syncretism, whose composition we now have to examine.

The basis of the Symbolist syncretism, its credo, so to say, would be the fundamental conception that we have just mentioned, i.e. the affirmation of a belief in Beauty perceived as the Absolute, as the truth to strive towards. However, facing the discrepancy between the cultural, sociological, and historical period they were living in and this ideal precept, Symbolism had to rely on the idea of a "fore-world", of a hidden ideal realm. Indeed, without this primary assumption, Symbolists would have belonged to the category of Utopians (even if they were very often considered as such in any case) and not to that of idealists, in the literal sense of the term. With regard to the conception of a fore-world, we have to put forward the idea that, on that point, Symbolists were the heirs of Romanticism, the Romantics themselves having been part of an idealist tradition that could be traced as far back as Ancient Greece. Indeed, Shelley, and, to a certain extent, Goethe, had been largely inspired by Plato, and, as Richard Jenkyns puts it, by "the Platonist doctrine that all transient things are

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[344] *Ibid.*, p.64

merely appearances".[345] We also have to keep in mind that before the enthusiasm of Shelley and his friends, this interest was " not shared by scholars. Plato began exciting interest at Cambridge in the 1820's. He did not appear on the syllabus at Oxford until 1847; twenty years later he dominated it."[346] In Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, Plato found his best advocates. Since then, his thought, and notably his dialectics, has been extensively examined, discussed, and studied, in the light of new translations, but, during the period we are interested in, Plato's conception of the world was very much perceived as dual, i.e. as divided between a "real world", that of appearances – as described in Plato's famous allegory of the cave – and an "ideal world", that of truth and beauty, an interpretation which largely sustained the idealism of a Shelley. In that, Plato – as interpreted in the nineteenth century – had a strong influence on the thought of the most important figures of Romanticism, and, as far as the Prometheus myth is concerned, on the very same Romantic figures who showed a deep interest in the Titan. It is therefore interesting to note that the Symbolist artists who inherited this interest also inherited the idea of a fore-world from this generation. In this regard, the Symbolist syncretism was indebted to Romanticism.

However, with regard to what made the specificity of the Symbolist fore-world, we also have to look into its inheritance from the previous Romantic generation, and in particular into Charles Baudelaire's legacy. Indeed, the French poet can be considered as the father of Symbolism, inasmuch as he gave striking expression to

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[345] In The Victorians and Ancient Greece, by Richard Jenkyns, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p.228. Writing of Goethe and the influence of Plato on his works, Richard Jenkyns establishes the fact that "Goethe bends Plato in a less abstract direction: it is not dialectic that leads us on but the Eternal feminine", also p.228

[346] *Ibid.*, p.228

what, to a large extent, defined and gave coherence to the Symbolist ideal realm we have just mentioned. Indeed, even if the theory of synaesthesia and correspondences is not Charles Baudelaire's invention, his poems gave substance to it.[347] We shall briefly try to explain what these ideas are and what they imply. As Bertrand Marchal puts it, the theory of correspondences is a "notion philosophico-mystic linked to the conception of a universe governed by the principle of analogy, and which became famous with the Baudelaire sonnet that was named after it. But Baudelaire, above all, gave all the poetical impetus to this notion by using it as the privileged instrument for transcending reality".[348] The definition of this notion allows us to understand why correspondences were a central notion for Symbolist artists. In actual fact, the establishment of a link of analogy between the reality they loathed and the fore-world they were aspiring to justified their creation and the very ground of their syncretism. The notion of synaesthesia is part of that of correspondences, since this word is applied to what Bertrand Marchal names "horizontal correspondences",[349] that is to say the level of sensation, that of the five senses, which, according to this principle, communicate. In this respect, the first step to access the Symbolist fore-world is this horizontal level of synasthesias, on which the communication and unification of sensible perceptions create correspondences. From those fundamental elements of the Symbolist syncretism derive essential Symbolist features and values. Indeed, as Dorothy Kosinski puts it, " Synaesthesia and the *total work of art* are ideas which represent the Symbolists' attempt to surpass the limited, descriptive vocabulary of the

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[347] Swedenborg, in The New Jerusalem, had actually already put forward the idea of correspondences, even if Baudelaire's poems, and in particular "Correspondances" and "La Vie antérieure" made the theory popular.
[348] In Lire le Symbolisme, by Bertrand Marchal, Dunod, Paris, 1993, p.173
[349] *Ibid.*, p.176

ordinary work of art, and to embrace this universal language of symbols. Music [...] is adopted as the ideal art form because of its non-mimetic, immaterial quality". We could even put forward the idea that the very Symbolist perception of the world in its totality is similar to that of a musical piece, in which the harmonics (the non descriptive symbols) would eventually create a figured harmony and "understanding" of the entire work. The Symbolist view of the world would therefore rely on its ultimate model: the musical one. In that, the theory of correspondences and synaesthesia, and, by extension, the musical ideal, appear as the pillars of the Symbolist syncretism. But we now have to examine the different threads the Symbolist syncretism intermingled, and what constituted its very own "Bible" – if we may risk the parallel – to understand Prometheus' importance within it. We must actually linger on the Symbolist specificity in order to take hold of the special use Symbolism made of Prometheus.

Symbolism rejected Judeo-Christianity, but its syncretism being based on the Judeo-Christian model, it is interesting to see that Symbolist artists looked into other forms of spirituality, and that they notably took a particular interest in eastern spirituality and art. Such an interest was not entirely new in France, since the poet Leconte de Lisle, in his Poèmes antiques (1852), along with the evocation of "traditional antiquity", had introduced his readers to Indian antiquity. However, the Symbolist craze for the eastern world represented a debt to another author, and, to be more precise, to a philosopher. Indeed, it was with passion that the Symbolists discovered Buddha through the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, who was himself dubbed the "contemporary Buddha". However, this fact itself shows that the Symbolist

"Orientalism" was in fact very European, and was itself known through what was already an appropriation. Schopenhauer's philosophy proved to be particularly influential on French Symbolism.[350] the first French translations of the philosopher appeared in France in 1877, and 1880 was the date of publication of Thoughts, Maxims and Fragments,[351] a book which to a certain extent gave shape to the pessimism of Decadence,[352] even though its was a compilation of extracts from various of the author's works.

Indeed, one of Schopenhauer's most important philosophical ideas is that the world's vital force is the Will, and that the self, being also ruled by this inner force, is a phenomenal illusion. Such an analysis is fraught with consequences for Schopenhauer, since, according to him, life is pure, endless suffering, which implies that the two only acceptable ways to escape the damnation of the Will are, firstly, Art and science, inasmuch as they make man strive towards the contemplation of the essence of things, and, secondly, a moral attitude consisting in self-denial, that is to say in a form of asceticism, whose model would be Buddhism.[353] It is also interesting to note that Schopenhauer, although overtly atheist, had sympathy for Catholicism, because of its ascetic dimension. In such a context, we can understand the fact that Schopenhauer, both for the exotic foundations of his philosophy and for the development of his pessimism, appealed to Symbolists. The acknowledgement of

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[350] The work of Jules Laforgue, for example, which can be perceived as a poetical version of Schopenhauer's philosophical texts, was deeply influenced by the German philosopher. However, the writings of Thomas Mann also reflect a strong interest in Schopenhauer.

[351] We also have to consider the fact that in 1874, Ribot had published La Philosophie de Schopenhauer, which explained the German's philosophy.

[352] In A Rebours, by Huysmans, Des Esseintes devotes a whole page to an apology for the German philosopher.

[353] Schopenhauer was actually the first Western philosopher who had access to translations of Indian Vedic and Buddhist texts

human suffering was the principle of his philosophy, which, as a result did not give false hopes to man. In that, Schopenhauer's philosophy perfectly matched the despair of the "fin de siècle" generation, as the asceticism he was preaching matched their resignation in facing life. Buddhism – as presented by Schopenhauer – had a direct influence on French Symbolist poets such as Gustave Kahn and Jules Laforgue, but the Symbolist interest in eastern spirituality is certainly more apparent in the pictorial field.[354] However, India and Buddhism were not the only elements of eastern spirituality which appealed to Symbolist artists. Indeed, their interest in Chinese and Japanese culture, together with their European apprehension of the Arabic world, left its mark on Symbolist paintings, whether in the depiction of exotic objects in the background, or in their subject matter itself.[355]

It is important to mention, in this respect, that some of the fundamental legends of the Symbolist syncretism, the most famous being that of Salomé, are Biblical stories. In the perspective of the Symbolist rejection of Judeo-Christianity, it could appear paradoxical to consider such material as part of the Symbolist syncretism. However, if we examine the case of the subject of Salomé (mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew [14, I-12] and Mark [6, 14-29]), it is worth noticing that, whereas in the Bible she is only presented as being responsible for St John the Baptist's death,[356] the focus shifted with the Symbolists, for whom she became the archetype of the "femme

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[354] Odilon Redon's Le Bouddha (c.1905), pastel on paper, 98 × 73 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, is certainly the best example of this interest.

[355] It is probably worth noticing that symbolist artists, following the model of Des Esseintes, often themselves collected exotic objects, most of the time Chinese. However, Lord Leighton and the French writer Pierre Loti, who both had an entire room made in the style of a Moroccan mosque, had nothing to envy in the extravaganzas of Des Esseintes.

[356] Listening to the advice of her mother Herodias, Salomé accepts to dance for Herod providing that he grants her John's head.

fatale", a sort of fascinating anti-model of the Victorian woman. In this respect, the Symbolists made a myth out of this Biblical story, by highlighting the exoticism of the account, together with its pagan aspect and the poisonous timeless beauty of Salomé[357].

Another way of evoking the Bible in an indirect manner was to replace its parables and stories by what we could name parallel accounts and myths, in order to elaborate the Symbolist syncretism. Greek mythology, in particular, provided Symbolism with many accounts, which had the evocative and symbolic power of Biblical texts, without their dogmatic aspect. It is for this reason that Nietzsche praised the Prometheus myth as a variation on the myth of the fall (the transgression of Prometheus entailing the loss of the golden age), because it developed the notion of "active sin", and ignored that of original sin. Symbolists were probably sensitive to this characteristic in their interest in Prometheus, but this element of the myth was not the one they were going to emphasise in the elaboration of their syncretism. We have noted in the first chapter of this work that Prometheus, especially during the phase of evangelisation, was identified with Jesus Christ, mainly because both of them went through an intense suffering. However, a similar association emerged anew in the nineteenth century, even if, at this time, the figure of Prometheus was somehow used to reflect that of the Christ, and not the other way round. Indeed, we now have to examine to what extent Prometheus appeared, in the Symbolist syncretism, as a substitute for God.

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[357] On the theme of Salomé, see '*A Note on "Salomé"* by Robert Ross, Salomé, by Oscar Wilde, Faber Drama series, London, 1989, pp.xv-xvii, and *Salomé, the Legacy of Oscar Wilde*, by Tomoko Sato, The Wilde Years, ed. by Tomoko Sato and Lionel Lambourne, Barbican Centre, 2000, pp.60-73

b. Prometheus as a substitute for God

In the first chapter of this study, I noted that the extensive use by scholars of the misleading quotations from Tertullian, "Hic est verus Prometheus, *Deus omnipotens* blasphemiis lancinatus",[358] and "Crucibus Causarum", made a large contribution to shaping an identification between Jesus Christ and Prometheus. As a matter of fact, in the nineteenth century, Tertullian's quotations were still used to justify the parallel between the Titan and Jesus Christ. Edgar Quinet was one of those who quoted this author in order to justify the "Christianisation" of Prometheus. Indeed, as Jacqueline Duchemin puts it,[359] he seems to have mixed a few quotations by Tertullian to make his point, probably without knowing that the original text from which he drew them was not as clear as he thought. In 1838, Quinet published his Prométhée,[360] a work which largely illustrates the way in which he interpreted Tertullian's words, and which also follows the lines of the Romantic vision of Prometheus. Although Quinet was not a Symbolist artist, it is certainly worth examining, even briefly, the work of this extremely influential academic. It will probably allow us to understand better the position of Symbolists in relation to the comparison that was established in the nineteenth century between Jesus Christ and Prometheus. However, for a detailed study of Edgar Quinet's Prométhée, it is advisable to refer to Jacqueline Duchemin's work on Prometheus.[361] We shall first briefly summarise the content of Edgar Quinet's Prométhée before examining the issues at stake in this work.

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358 "Here is the real Prometheus, the omnipotent God, pierced by blasphemy"
359 In Prométhée, histoire du mythe, de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes, by Jacqueline Duchemin, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2000, p.112
360 Prométhée, by Edgar Quinet, Paris, 1838
361 In Prométhée, histoire du mythe, de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes, by Jacqueline Duchemin, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2000, pp.112-115.

Edgar Quinet's dramatic poem Prométhée borrows from Æschylus' trilogy the titles of its three parts: " Prométhée inventeur du feu", "Prométhée enchaîné", and " Prométhée délivré".[362] However, although the general frame of Quinet's work seems close to that of Æschylus, its orientation is very different, each section of the poem being punctuated by quotations from Tertullian's or Lactance's works, and, as Jacqueline Duchemin puts it, by "Christian premonitions".[363] In "Prométhée inventeur du feu", Prometheus creates Hesione, the mother of mankind, thanks to a sparkle stolen from the volcano of Cyclops, but as soon as men are given birth, they ask for Gods. The chorus of the Cyclops fears human thought, which challenges Pagan Gods:

Il part, vaisseau bercé sur le roulis des âges,
Pour aborder chez d'autres dieux.[364]

In the second part of the poem, "Prométhée enchaîné", Prometheus is crucified on his rock on Mount Caucasus, where he is visited by Ocean, the father of Oceanids, who reports to Prometheus the ungratefulness of men towards the Titan: they are devoted to his enemies, the gods. After the death of Hesione, Prometheus, prophet-like, announces the death of the Olympian Gods, after which he adds:

Le croirez-vous? Mes yeux voient un autre Caucase...[365]

Quel est, sur la sainte colline,

Cet autre Prométhée à la face divine?...

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[362] Which would be the equivalent of "Prometheus porphyros", whose significance, however, would be "Fire carrier" more than "inventor", and, naturally, "Prometheus Bound" and "Prometheus Unbound".
[363] *Ibid.*, p.112
[364] In Prométhée, by Edgar Quinet, Paris, 1838, I, iv, p.50 and 53
" She leaves, the ship rocked by the rolling of ages,
To reach the land of other gods".
[365] "Will you believe me ? I can see another Caucasus".

Est-ce un Titan esclave? Un Dieu crucifié?

O Prodige! Il bénit l'univers qui l'opprime.

Les cieux obéissants s'inclinent sous ses pieds... [366]

In the third and last part of Quinet's poem, the fusion between mythology and Christianity proves to be even more daring, when the archangels Michael and Raphael, coming down from Heaven, have a glimpse of Prometheus on his rock, and stop in order to listen to his story,[367] after which they free him. Then, Michael himself pierces the vulture with one of his arrows! When Prometheus asks the archangels whom he has to thank for his deliverance, Michael answers:

Celui qui nous envoie et qui sait tes misères.

Ton père est Jéhovah, et nous sommes tes frères.

Des liens du sépulcre archange racheté,

Il est temps de rentrer dans la sainte cité.[368]

The work of Edgar Quinet, as we can see, is very daring, since he makes of the Pagan hero an archangel and puts his martyrdom on the same level as the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As Jacqueline Duchemin puts it, "The author himself does not know how to place his hero in regard to the new faith, and in no way manages to integrate

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[366] In Prométhée, by Edgar Quinet, Paris, 1838, II, v, pp.75-79
"Who is, on the holy hill,
This other Prometheus with a divine face?...
Is he an enslaved Titan? A crucified God?
O miracle! He blesses the Universe that oppresses him.
The obeying Heavens bow under his feet..."

[367] As Jacqueline Duchemin puts it, p.116, Quinet tries to link Prometheus' account to that of the Genesis.

[368] In Prométhée, by Edgar Quinet, Paris, 1838, III, iii, p.121
The one who sends us and knows your misery.
Your father is Jehovah, and we are your brothers.
From the Tomb bounds redeemed,
It is time to return to the Holy city.

him clearly to the development of Genesis".[369] But we can also perceive that the originality of Quinet, here, is precisely his attempt to combine myth and religion, and to glorify the second by doing so. Quinet's approach to a comparison between Jesus Christ and Prometheus is not to throw light on religion by examining myths, as much as to make a synthesis of them in order to enrich the Christian dogma. But even if such a parallelwas not, in itself, new, such a synthesis was. Indeed, we have to bear in mind that before Quinet and Tertullian, and at the beginning of Evangelisation, religious scholars were, on the other hand, very careful not to draw a parallel between Prometheus and Jesus Christ, despite their common traits.

This might seem surprising when such scholars were usually not reluctant to use the theory of Pagan forebodings, and therefore to make use of mythological characters to explain the Bible. The main reason for their unwillingness to emphasise the similitude between these two characters lies in the fact that the Pagan one embodied the idea of transgression. Indeed, the passages of the Bible that mainly justify the parallel between Jesus Christ and Prometheus are the story of the "Mount of Olives", and, of course, the crucifixion. However, even if Jesus Christ expresses his misunderstanding of God's silence during his Calvary, the next step is not taken, since "the designs of God are impenetrable". Jesus Christ's "God, why have you forsaken me" is a questioning, and not a cry of revolt. In this respect, it is easy to perceive why religious scholars were not willing to make use of Prometheus' figure to highlight the Bible.

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[369] In P.H.M. p.117

However, in the nineteenth century, the main shift in the perception of the Prometheus myth had already occurred, and the aspect of transgression was now seen as secondary in comparison to the double nature and human side of Prometheus. Quinet's work, in this respect, is relevant of this aspect of transgression, and, even if in terms of aesthetics, his Prométhée has nothing to do with Symbolism as such, the fact that he tried to write a poem to make a parallel between Prometheus and Jesus Christ is very revealing of the evolution of the perception of Prometheus. If there were a parallel between the Prometheus myth and the Bible, it was now based on Prometheus' persona and Jesus', and not on the original value of the myth hinging on the sin of Prometheus. At the end of the nineteenth century, the perception of Prometheus and the main trait of his persona made of him the benefactor of mankind, and the great sacrificial victim. In this context, we can understand why an identification with Jesus Christ developed. However, even if for the previous generations of Romanticism, Jesus Christ, to a certain extent, had become a literary character, the situation changed in the context of the crisis of faith. In the light of the new syncretism, many Symbolist artists avoided refering to him. Although some Symbolists, like Jules Laforgue, were not afraid of using him in their poems – usually simply depicted as a man – most Symbolist artists attempted to build their syncretism entirely away from the Judo-Christian system. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that by reacting against Christianity and its structure of beliefs and values, this latter remained their point of reference, even if a negative one. The consequence of this characteristic of the Prometheus myth was that the Titan, for artists whose spirituality

remained strong in spite of the disorientation of their faith, became the double of Jesus Christ.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, in Prometheus Unbound, had already compared one to the other. But Symbolist artists superimposed them. It is particularly striking in the pictorial field. The traditional way in which Jesus Christ was represented was then applied to the Titan. In our final chapter, we shall make a detailed study of Gustave Moreau's depictions of Prometheus, which clearly refer to the Christ, and are probably the most revealing examples of the use of Prometheus as a substitute for Him. However, a less famous painting such as Briton Riviere's Prometheus (Fig.9)[370]represents the Titan crucified on a very sheer cliff, which has the same verticality as Christ's cross.

Fig.9

[370] Prometheus(1889), by Briton Riviere, oil on canvas, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England.

Moreover, the eagle, on top and at the centre of the canvas highlights the three-quarter angle of the composition, and prolongs the bent elbow of Prometheus, thus producing the visual effect of a cross. The positioning of Prometheus' body – notably his feet – together with his bearing and the inclination of his head are in line with the traditional Christian depiction of Jesus. However, even if the pictorial representation of Prometheus is particularly revealing of the fact that artists of the end of the nineteenth century did not entirely dispose of the Christian tradition, and used the Titan as another figure of Jesus Christ, this assimilation was not restricted to this field of art. In 1900, Jean Lorrain and Ferdinand Hérold wrote a lyrical tragedy to music by Gabriel Fauré, a tragedy characterised by a return to God. However, because the piece was also intentionally written in an archaic style, as an homage to Æschylus, we shall not examine it, and remain focused on the Symbolist interpretations of Prometheus.

It is important to note again, here, that at the end of the nineteenth century, Symbolist artists were not alone in finding Prometheus appealing as a substitute for God. Indeed, paradoxically, although positivism was all that the Symbolists despised, it is interesting to see that it found in Prometheus the image of a sort of invincible conqueror. Prometheus embodied mankind, with unlimited – godlike – powers, gained through the mastery of sciences. Although positivism does not necessarily imply a rejection of religion, its values were nonetheless not easily compatible with the idea of God. In this respect, Prometheus appeared as the perfect emblem of the belief that man had replaced God. However, such a use of the Promethean figure relied on the original myth itself, with the symbol of fire and the idea of

transgression, and not on the persona Prometheus had eventually gained through history. However, it is important to mention it, since Prometheus as perceived through positivist eyes had a long life, and determined the interpretation of the Titan in the twentieth century, and even nowadays. The communist interpretation of the Titan, based on Marxist writings, also shaped the perception of Prometheus in a similar way, since in the USSR, Prometheus, as a symbol, was given a similar function, to glorify productivity and the power of man. To return to Prometheus and Symbolism, it is worth mentioning that the Titan was not the only mythological character to be used as a substitute for God by Symbolist artists. Orpheus also appeared as a key figure within the Symbolist syncretism, and, intriguingly, artists who treated the subject of Prometheus very often treated that of Orpheus as well. In the perspective of the constitution of the Symbolist syncretism and the role Prometheus had in it, the question of a conflation between Prometheus and Orpheus now has to be raised.

c. Prometheus' association with Orpheus

The figure of Orpheus within Symbolism had an essential and complex role, whose value was the subject of the exhaustive Orpheus in Nineteenth-Century Symbolism,[371] by Dorothy Kosinski. In order to be as precise as possible in drawing parallels between Orpheus and Prometheus, I shall refer to this invaluable study. Indeed, a contextualisation of both myths, here again, is a requirement for the understanding of their affiliation, inasmuch as the nature of their association

[371] Orpheus in Nineteenth-Century Symbolism by Dorothy Kosinski, UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1989

fundamentally lies in the Symbolist appropriation of their symbolic value. With regard to Prometheus' link to Orpheus, we cannot but start with the statement that some Symbolist artists who showed an artistic interest in Prometheus also often count among their works a treatment of Orpheus. Although we cannot, of course, put that forward as a rule, one nevertheless cannot neglect the fact that Franz Liszt, Gustave Moreau, G.F. Watts and Jean Delville also treated both subjects, and occasionally drew a noticeable stylistic parallel between Orpheus and Prometheus through the way they depicted them. We are therefore entitled to wonder what kind of link might have existed for Symbolist artists between the two Greek mythological characters.

Firstly, it is worth noticing that Orpheus, both as a myth and as persona, had also evolved throughout history. In the Symbolist context, the Orpheus myth, like the Prometheus myth, took on a very particular meaning. Indeed, Orpheus appears as one of the favourite Symbolist subjects, artists from that period mainly concentrating on his death rather than on other mythic aspects. In order to be more accurate in the analysis of the association of Prometheus and Orpheus, it is essential to mention, however briefly, the different elements constituting the Orpheus myth:

Orpheus the Thracian, son of the muse Calliope, had the power to enchant men, trees, stones, animals, streams, and even gods when striking the golden lyre that Apollo had given to him. He won the heart of Eurydice, but, while they were dancing during their wedding feast, a snake stung the heel of Orpheus' bride, who died on that same day. Inconsolable, Orpheus eventually went to the gates of Hades, to seek his beloved where no mortal could go. Orpheus succeeded in his attempt, since his music enchanted Charon, Cerberus, and Pluto himself, who decided to let Eurydice go back

to the world of the living. However, Pluto warned Orpheus not to look behind to check if Eurydice was really following him until they reached the upper air. This is how Orpheus, too eager to see his wife, lost her for the second time. Faithful to Eurydice, the bereaved Orpheus did not smile back at any of the women who would have liked to console him. One day, Orpheus did not heed the outcry of a troop of women frenzied by Dionysian rites, Maenads, who invited him to join their revel. Furious, they tore Orpheus in pieces. Thus scattered in Nature, his head nonetheless carried on singing to the miraculous sound of his lyre.

The short account of the Orpheus myth given above allows us to notice the main elements it contains. Firstly, we can note that one of the Orpheus persona's essential characteristics is the fact that he appears as an enchanter. The second important element of the myth is not an aspect of Orpheus' persona, but an account within the myth: the love story between Orpheus and Eurydice. Eventually, the mysterious death of Orpheus and its symbolic import forms another coherent element. In this respect, it is interesting to consider, with Dorothy Kosinski, that "the Symbolists demonstrate relatively minimal interest in the role of Eurydice, the Romantic tale of Orpheus' undying love, the gothic horror of his quest in Hades. [...] It is especially Orpheus' death which most fascinated the Symbolists. In contrast to images from earlier periods, the Symbolists eschew the sexually aggressive image of the onslaught of the crazed Maenads, in favour of the aftermath of the Bacchic destruction".[372] In that, we can see that the Symbolists focused and shaped their interpretation of the Orpheus myth on the third main element that we distinguished within the myth.

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[372] In Orpheus in Nineteenth-Century Symbolism, by Dorothy M. Kosinski, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989, p.xiv

In actual fact, it is not surprising to notice that Symbolist artists turned towards the most mysterious part of the myth, those linked to Orphism and to the symbolic disintegration of Orpheus in nature.[373] Symbolism being an attempt to regain a lost harmony, its understanding of the Orpheus myth was to perceive it as the symbol of a symbiotic connection with nature, and furthermore, the very symbol of the synaesthetic ideal. It implies that the death of Orpheus, to Symbolist artists, appeared as the embodiment of their fulfilled ideal. Such an interpretation had an immediate consequence on the Symbolist pictorial treatment of the Orpheus myth. In such treatments of the subject, the landscape has a special significance. The Theosophist Edouard Schuré described these as psychological landscapes, playing a role analogous to that of the Wagnerian orchestra. Through nuances and harmonies it modulates emotions of the interior drama, prolonging those feelings in time and space. The Symbolists develop an anti-naturalist concept of the landscape, exploring the popular concepts of synaesthesia and correspondences, to create landscapes which express an interior reality".[374] In the case of Orpheus' death, what was expressed, certainly more than an "interior reality", was the accomplishment of a communication, or even a communion, between the world of our perception and the Symbolist ideal fore-world.

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[373] We have to mention that Orphic cults did not appear before the sixth century B.C. and that their leader, Orpheus, is not the same as Hesiod's. However, Dorothy Kosinki notes that their personae are "inextricably intermingled" (*Ibid.*, p.2). Although Orphic cults were devoted to Zagreus-Dionysus, Dorothy Kosinski notes that "Orpheus' own fate –his descent into Hades and death by dismemberment – parallels the story of the Orphic deity himself" (*Ibid.*). Therefore, the intermingling of both Orpheuses is particularly clear in the Symbolist interpretation of the myth, since it emphasises, through the focus of Orpheus' death, the symbolic reunification and communion with nature.

[374] In Orpheus in Nineteenth-Century Symbolism, by Dorothy M. Kosinski, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989, p.xiv

In that, we can notice a first parallel with the Symbolist Promethean figure. If we apprehend the two myths as pure literary accounts, it is pointless to look for a parallel between Orpheus and Prometheus. However, on a symbolic level, what they represent is striving towards the same end. Indeed, Symbolists chose both Prometheus and Orpheus as symbols of a new realm, even if the means to reach that end differ in the two myths. In both cases, the new world order, characterised by the symbiosis with Nature, comes as the result of transgression. As we have already examined it, in the Prometheus myth the new order arises from a glorification of action. In the case of Orpheus, however, the death of the mythological character, which marks the same cosmic accomplishment, symbolically takes the form of a harmonious fusion. In the Prometheus myth there is a conquest; in the Orpheus myth, a symbolic rebirth. This is why William Pencak can put forward the idea that "Orpheus is a gentler counterpart of Prometheus, giving humanity a taste of the bliss, rather than the power, enjoyed by the gods. Both are prophets of freedom, and thus rebels and outlaws who defy an old order of heaven and earth that would confine people and deprive them of the joy and sensitivity they need to be more than cogs in earthly or supernatural machinery".[375] The "active sin" of Prometheus, as Nietzsche puts it, is the obvious reason for his punishment, but Orpheus' "sin" can be perceived on different levels. He actually goes where no living man had been before, which is in itself a clear demonstration of hubris. However, we focus, with Dorothy Kosinski, on Orpheus' death, his sin also

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[375] In Lyres against the Law, by William Pencak, Legal Studies Forum volume XXIII, Number 3, Washington, 1999, p.294.

relies on his "revelation of secrets or mysteries to mankind".[376] In that, Orpheus would be close to Prometheus, who reveals self-awareness to mankind. However, both myths ultimately refer to a cosmogony, which probably explains why they are so important within the Symbolist syncretism, and, most importantly, why an association was formed between Orpheus and Prometheus. Dorothy Kosinski examined very closely the parallel existing between Orpheus and Jesus Christ[377] in Gustave Moreau's work, and we shall be led to examine in our next chapter the figure of Prometheus in the French painter's work. We shall therefore attempt to illustrate the nature of that association with the works of Jean Delville and George Frederic Watts.

George Frederic Watts is, with the exception of Briton Riviere, the only British Symbolist artist who is known to have depicted Prometheus during the period we are interested in, and his depiction of Prometheus is one of the most striking within Symbolism because of the dreamlike though energetic atmosphere that it conjures up. In Prometheus (Fig.10)[378], Watts chose to depict the gigantic Titan on a rock, to which no chains bind him.

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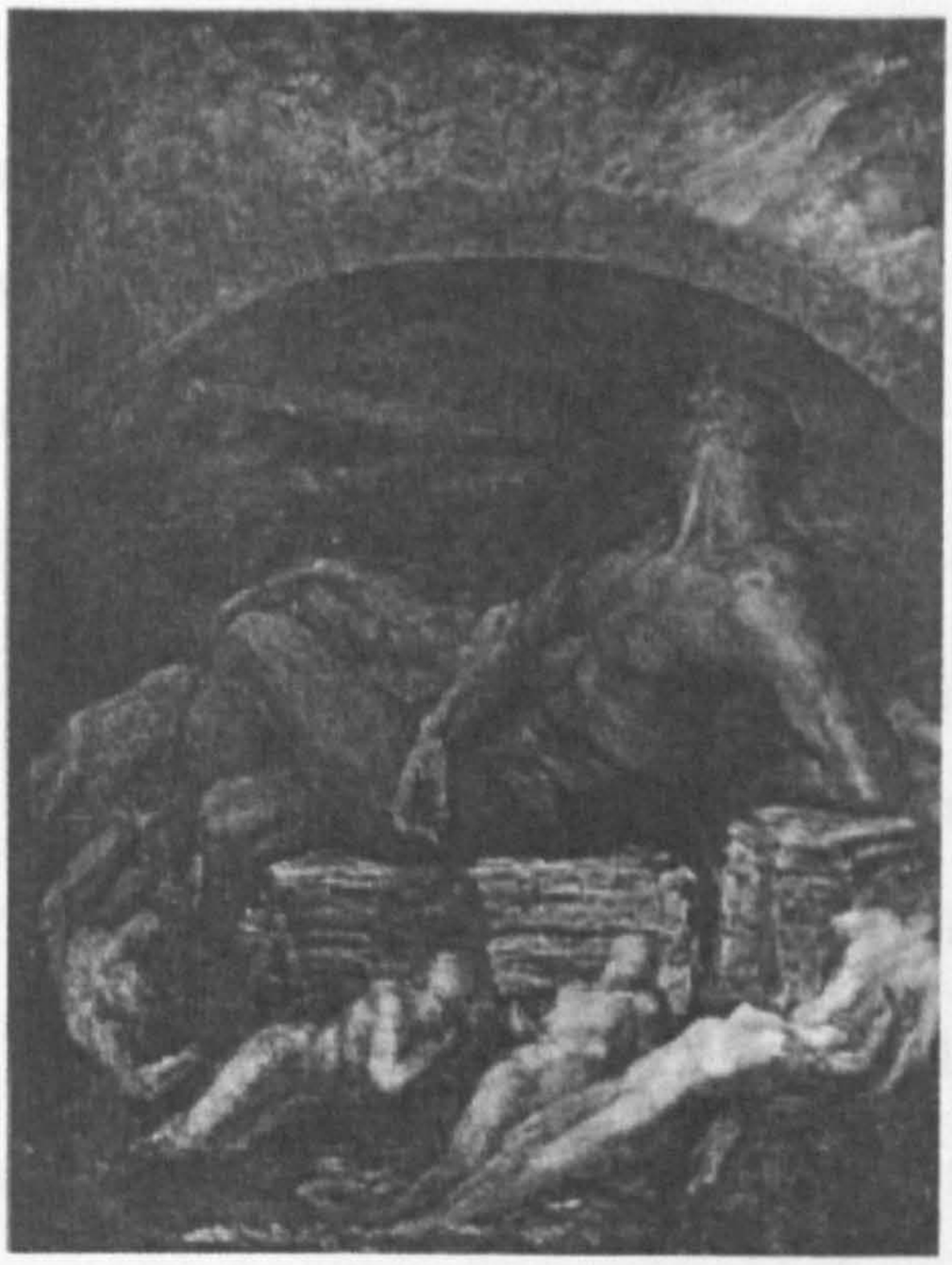
[376] In Orpheus in Nineteenth-Century Symbolism, by Dorothy M. Kosinski, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989, p. 189

[377] *Ibid.*, pp.69-73 ; 151-155; 192-198

[378] Prometheus (1857-1904), by George Frederick Watts, oil on canvas, 53.3 × 66 cm, Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey.



Picture taken before Watts decided to cover up the flaming semi-circle

Fig.10

Surrounded by comparatively small female figures appearing like the oceanids, he gazes into the distance, sitting up, legs crossed and raised on his elbow, in a relaxed and meditative attitude. In the background of the painting, a textural semi circle can be clearly perceived above Prometheus' head. This has a strong compositional effect, since the female figures at Prometheus' feet also form a semi-circle. Prometheus is thus represented in the middle of a circle. The superior semi-circle was originally intended as a flaming sun, emphasising Prometheus' element, but Watts eventually decided to keep its outline only. What is particularly interesting is that this particular painting is linked to Chaos, of which one version was entitled The Titans.[379] Watts

[379] Chaos was part of a scheme for a fresco in a great hall. The first version, a study in blue and gold, was Chaos, or The Titans (1873-1875), by George Frederic Watts, oil on canvas, 71.1 × 111.8 cm, Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey; the other versions are Chaos (1882), by G.F. Watts, oil on canvas, 302 × 104 cm, National

had the habit of modifying and reworking his paintings, so that even though he started Prometheus on his return from Asia Minor in 1857, he was still at work on it in 1904, the year of his death. Therefore, he worked on it while painting Chaos, for which title he regretted not having chosen Cosmos, or, even more interestingly, Chaos passing to Cosmos[380]. The reason why it is important to mention this is that Chaos and Prometheus were part of the same vision. The landscape and the setting in which the Titans are represented, the female figures and the mysterious dawn are the same in the two paintings. Watts said himself, that "Silent and Mighty Repose should be stamped upon the character and disposition of the giants; and revolving centuries and cycles should glide personified by female figures of great beauty, beneath the crags upon which the mighty forms should lie".[381] Since the oceanids, here, are the symbolic representation of time, Prometheus has to be interpreted accordingly. The figure of the Titan is part of this powerful atmospheric and symbolic landscape, and part of this cosmos at stake. The fact that Prometheus is encircled by the female representations of Time, and by the globe-like outline he is gazing at takes on a new significance: the round pattern, in this context, would appear as the symbolic representation of the cosmic regeneration, and Prometheus would be turning towards the dawn of a new world. The focus Watts chose on Prometheus here is the same as the Symbolist focus on Orpheus: Prometheus is depicted endowed with his cosmogonic powers, and not under the mask of the rebel or the great martyr. Like the

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Gallery, London, and Chaos (1882), by G.F.Watts, oil on canvas, 317.5 × 104 cm, Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey

[380] Cf. Marry Watts's catalogue at the Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey, p.24.

[381] *Ibid.*

image of Orpheus, that of Prometheus is used by Watts to represent the ideal symbolic, and indeed Symbolist harmony with Nature.

The parallel drawn between the two mythological figures is even clearer in Jean Delville's paintings entitled Orphée aux enfers[382] (Fig.11) and Prométhée[383] (Fig.12).

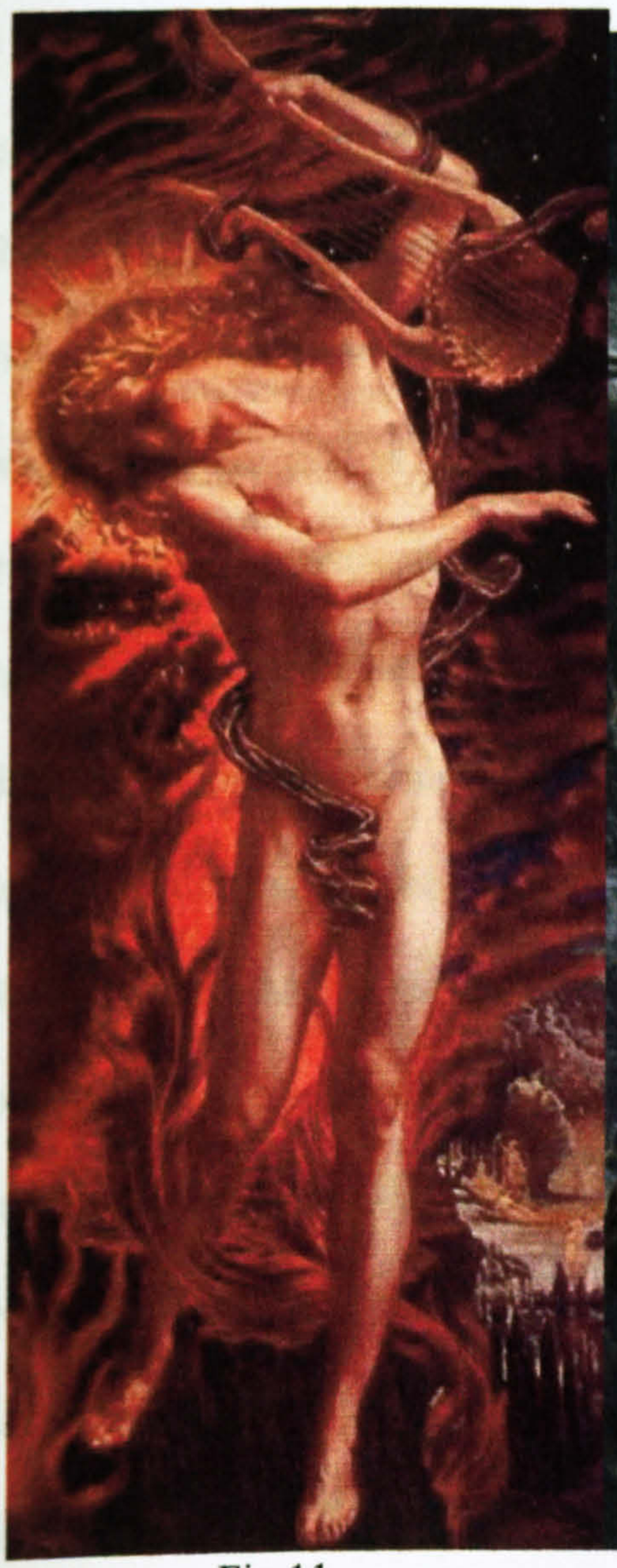

Fig.11

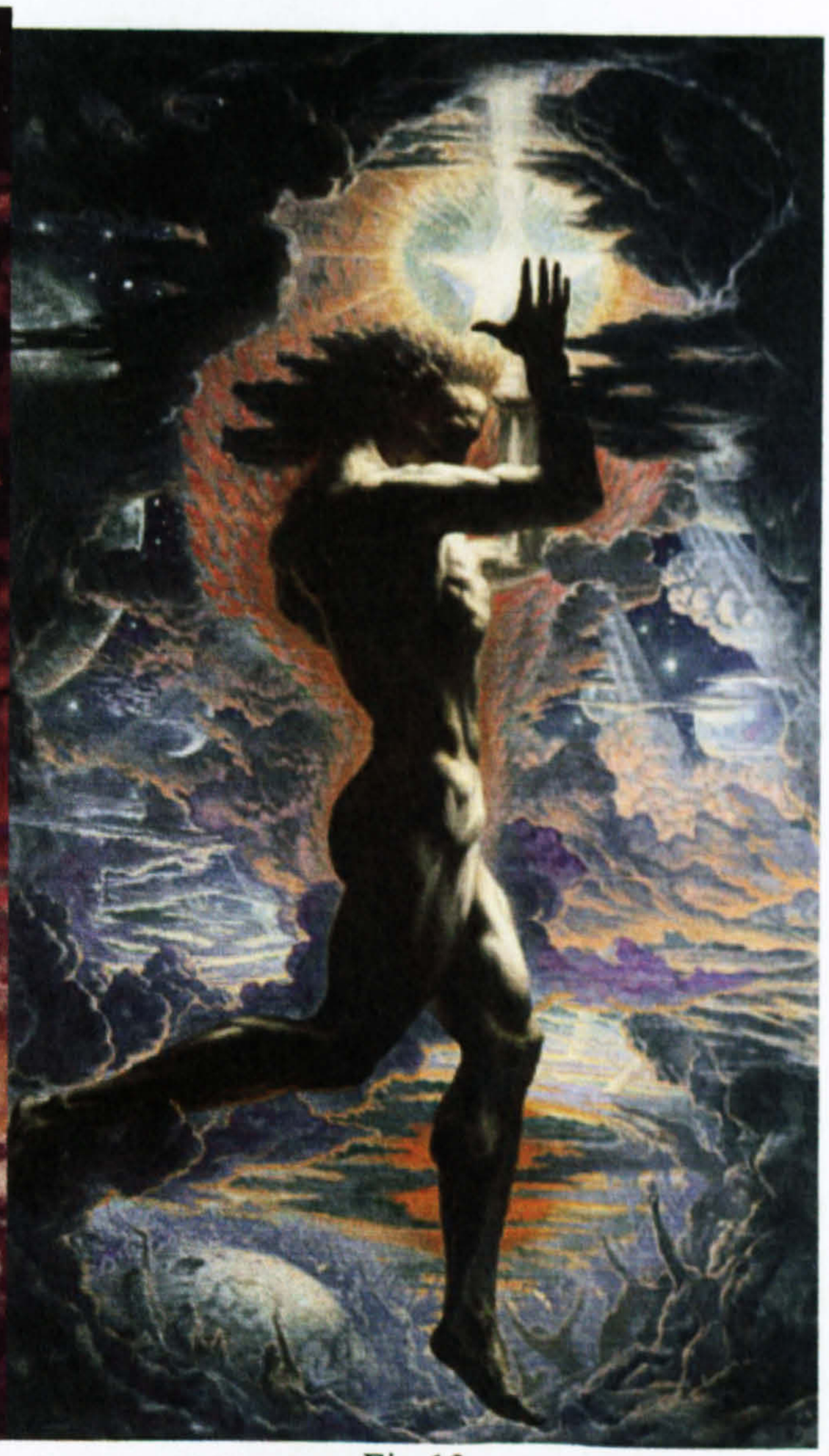

Fig.12

[382] Orphée aux enfers (1896), by Jean Delville, oil on canvas, private collection.
[383] Prométhée (1907) by Jean Delville, oil on canvas, 500 × 250 cm, Free University, Brussels.

The similarities between them are so great that, even though the latter was painted more than 10 years after Orphée aux enfers, the two paintings almost seem to form a diptych. The narrow frames actually focus on the standing figures in motion of the two mythological characters, Prometheus being presented in profile – emphasising the musculature of his body – whereas Orpheus' twisted torso, at a three-quarter angle, creates an impression of swirling motion that makes of his lyre a prolongation of his body. The two landscapes in the background of the paintings are particularly striking. The compositions appear as full-length portraits, in which the landscape represents a mere part in terms of surface. However, it is much more than a simple setting. In the case of Orphée aux enfers, the landscape has two different functions: a narrative one, since one can perceive Pluto, Persephone and Eurydice in the distance, and, more importantly, it also highlights the power of Orpheus. Indeed, his lyre seems to create a turmoil of the elements, a swirl in the Underworld, an effect which underlines the cosmogonic powers of Orpheus. In this respect, even if Delville's painting refers to the love story of Orpheus and Eurydice, and not to the death of the mythological character, what appears as essential in his composition is the magic power of Orpheus the enchanter. In spite of the subject treated here, Eurydice herself is almost imperceptible in the background. It is paradoxical to notice that Orphée[384] (Fig.13),

[384] Orphée (1893), by Jean Delville, private collection

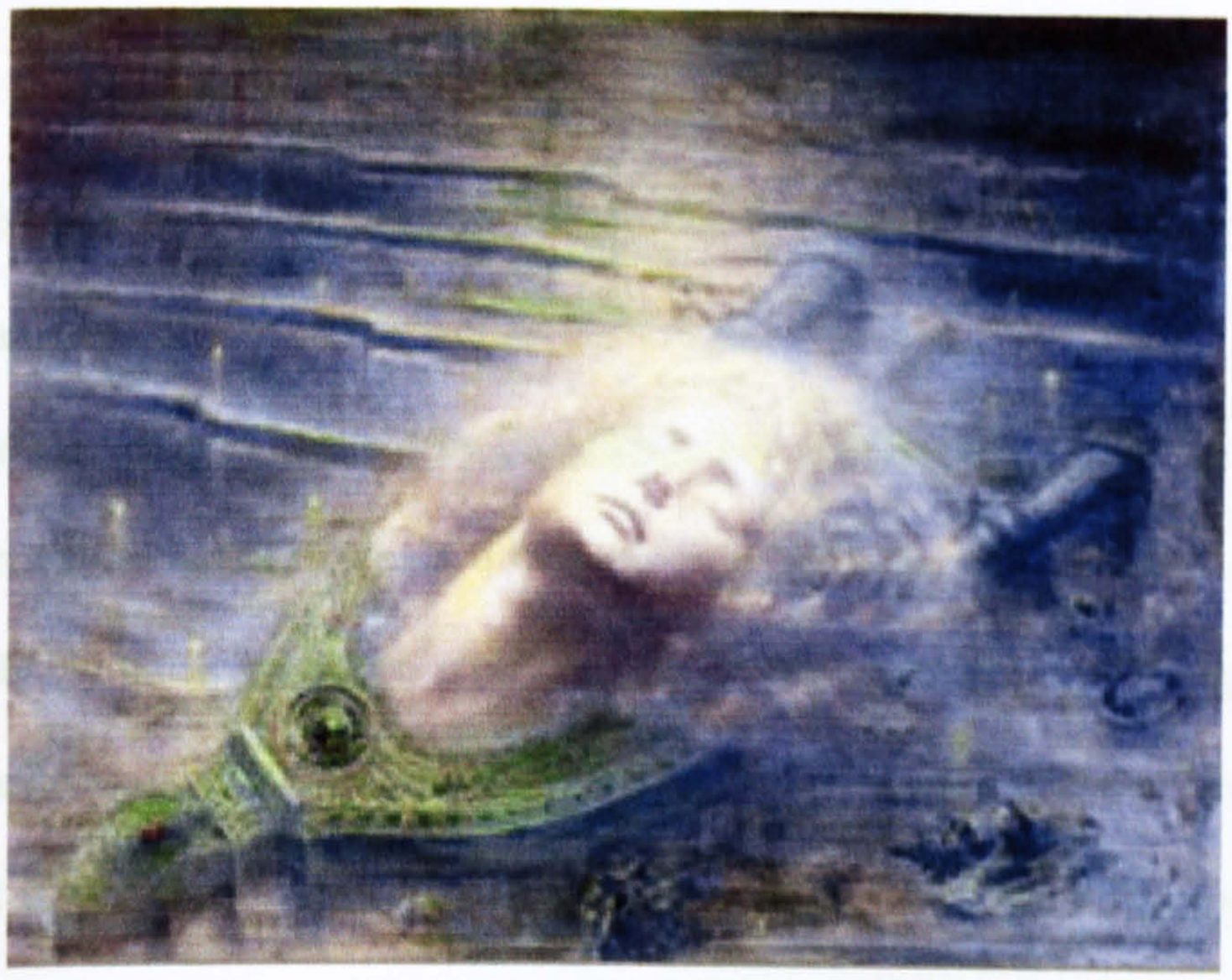

Fig.13

the most famous painting by Delville, depicts the favourite Symbolist topic within the myth – his severed head on his lyre floating on the water – but that the emphasis on Orpheus' powers over nature is not as clear as in Orphée aux enfers.

If we now examine Prométhée, its background, composed of a similar chaotic landscape, seems to indicate that a cosmogony is at stake. Prometheus, indeed, sheds light all around him. His titanic feet are surrounded with men, which emphasises both the fact that his creatures are made to his own image, and are symbolically enlightened by him. His head, amongst planets, glows with fire. Symbolic dark clouds disintegrate around him. As Orpheus was brandishing his lyre above his head, Prometheus also carries the instrument of his cosmogonic powers above him: a radiant star encircled in a globe, which could symbolise self-awareness and the creative power of mankind. Such a depiction of Prometheus, with his luminous globe, recalls the illustrations of William Blake's myth-making work The Urizen Books,

which also represent essential primitive forces and depict with great strength symbols of a cosmogony.[385]

A very important point shared by Prométhée and Orphée aux enfers comes from the depiction of the heads of the two mythological characters, surmounted by a sort of halo probably partly meant to represent the crown of martyrdom. In Prométhée, the star actually plays that role, as well as emphasising the idea that the Titan's love for mankind is also the very reason for his martyrdom. In the case of Prométhée, which was painted when Delville was deeply influenced by Theosophy, the halo also symbolised the elemental force of fire. However, examining the preliminary sketches of the painting, we can put forward the idea that the haloes appear as an essential aspect of the composition of Delville's paintings, since they reveal one of the main links between Orpheus and Prometheus. Indeed, their association might stem from the fact that both mythological characters were used by Symbolists as a substitute for Jesus Christ. It is particularly interesting to consider that the composition of another of Delville's paintings, which is representative of his treatment of Christian subjects, L'Homme Dieu (The Godlike Man)[386] (Fig.14), is very similar to that of his Prométhée.

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[385] Delville actually deeply admired the work of the English artist, which he may have discovered through his Preraphaelite friends.

[386] L'Homme Dieu (1901-1903), by Jean Delville, oil on canvas, 550 × 500 cm, Groeningemuseum, Bruges.

Fig.14

Most troubling is the title, which could also apply to the Titan. In L'Homme Dieu, a luminous Christ rises above a pyramid of men, smaller in scale than God's son, a proceeding which will later be emphasised in Prométhée, whose composition was surely influenced by Delville's depiction of Christ. Indeed, in one of the first sketches of Prométhée[387] (Fig.15), in 1892, Delville had planned to represent Prometheus on his rock, freshly unbound and weakened, near the dead eagle that had tormented him. In a later sketch[388] (Fig.16), from 1904, Delville represented Prometheus rising on his rock, again, but only to bring the "traditionally" haloed muscular conqueror closer to the sky.

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[387] Study for Prométhée (1892), by Jean Delville, ink and watercolors on paper, 34 × 22 cm, private collection.
[388] Sketch for Prométhée (1904), by Jean Delville, ink on paper, 16 × 12 cm, private collection.

Fig.15

Fig.16

Indeed, the bust of the Titan in that sketch is very similar to its depiction in the final version, in which Delville added the features shared by Prométhée and L'Homme Dieu, i.e. the presence of men on a small scale, and the dramatic sky. Such an evolution of the conception of Prométhée tends to prove that Delville's treatment of Jesus Christ influenced his perception and depiction of the Titan. Even more troubling is his last depiction of Prometheus, for Scriabin's score of his symphonic poem Prometheus, in 1911 (Fig.17)[389].

[389] Delville's painting had given Scriabin the idea of writing his Poem of Fire, and Delville designed the cover of the score especially for his friend

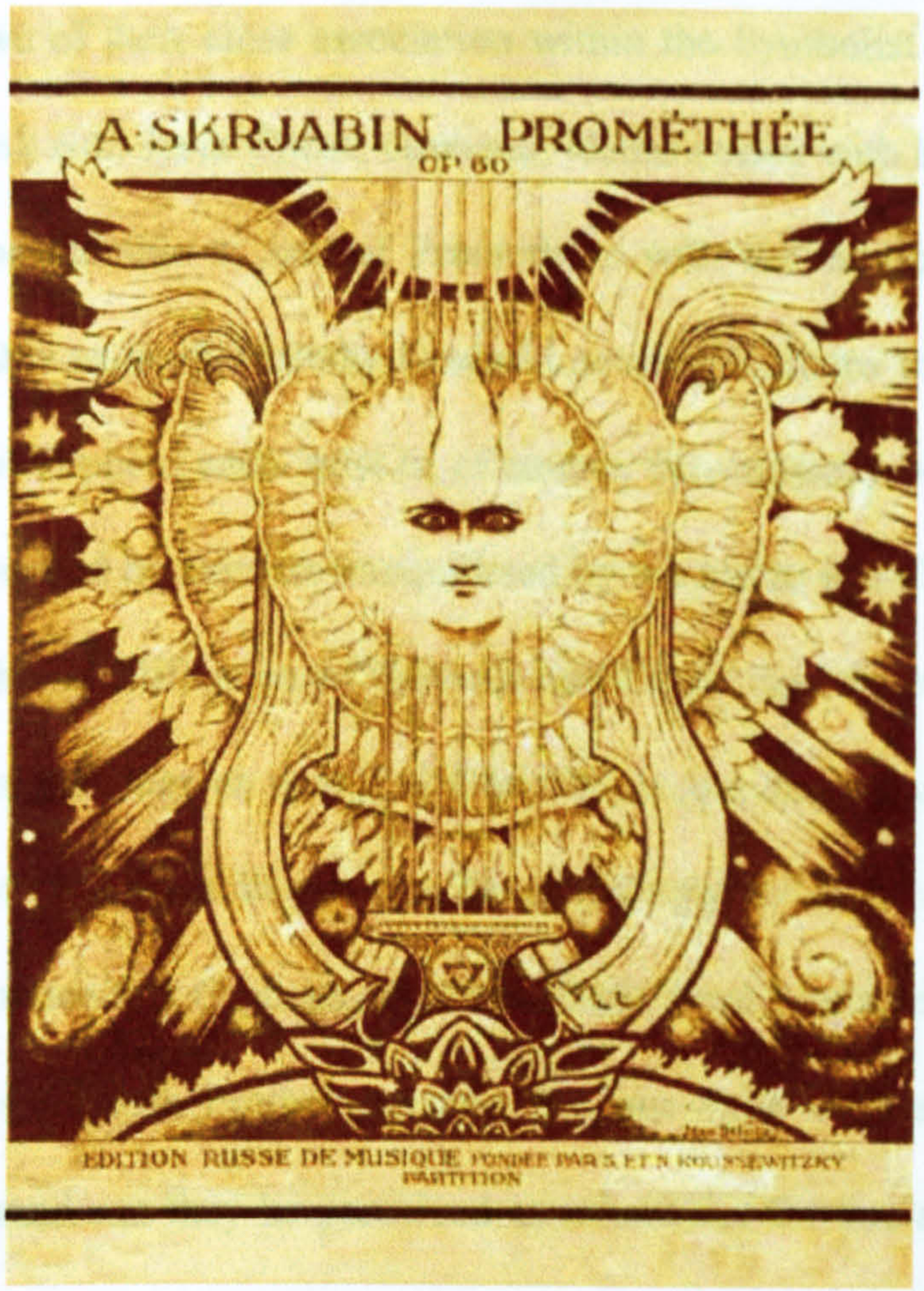

Fig.17

The influence of freemasonry and Theosophy on Delville dominates that drawing, which is a complex intermingling of symbols, amongst which are fire (The flame of Wisdom), and a lyre, the traditional emblem of Orpheus! The lotus, which represents the spirituality of Asia, earth, and Lucifer's five-branch star are also represented in this complex drawing. Delville's interest in theosophy probably pushed him to represent the other arch-rebel bringer of light. We shall examine Scriabin's work and its significance in the perspective of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, dear to the Symbolists' hearts, in our last chapter, during which we shall also consider the relationship between Theosophy and the last generation of Symbolists. However, we can see that Delville's drawing, with its combination of the Prometheus and Orpheus figures, is

also representative of their close association within the Symbolist syncretism. With regard to their link with Jesus Christ, Orpheus' identification with Him by Symbolist artists was as considerable as that of Prometheus with the Biblical figure, and its roots were probably as deep. Dorothy Kosinski actually explains that " the basis for this association of Orpheus and Christ is, of course, the similarity between the image of Orpheus surrounded by animals tranquillised by his music and Christ as the Good Shepherd [...] This identification of Orpheus and Christ may depend, moreover, on other important similarities as well.[...] Christ's passion and resurrection echo the central episode of the Orphic theogony – Zagreus Dionysus' death and rebirth".[390] It is interesting to notice that Orpheus and Prometheus were associated with Christ for different qualities. If both Prometheus and Orpheus were used as substitutes for Christ, on no ground can they be perceived as substitutes for one another. Both are identified with Christ because of their "martyrdom", which recalls Christ's Passion, but if we only take that episode into account, we could put forward the idea that in respect of what they embody within the Symbolist syncretism, Prometheus and Orpheus are complementary characters.

Indeed, whereas the identification of Prometheus with Christ hinges on their common love for mankind, which leads both of them to sacrifice, that of Orpheus with Christ seems to be based on their death, and what ensues. In actual fact, the resurrection that follows Christ's passion and Orpheus' mysterious song after his death present similarities. It is true that the deaths of most martyrs, as described in

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[390] In Orpheus in Nineteenth-Century Symbolism, by Dorothy M. Kosinski, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989, p.8. Dorothy Kosinski also mentions amongst those similarities a parallel between Orpheus in Hades and Christ's harrowing of hell as well as one between Orphic cults and Christianity.

the Bible, are also of a supernatural nature, but the symbolic link existing between Jesus Christ and Orpheus is based on more than this characteristic of martyrdom. As a matter of fact, the manifestations of Christ and Orpheus after their deaths mark in both cases the beginning of a new understanding of the world. The miraculous resurrection of Christ marks the origin of Christianity as a cult, while the song of Orpheus' severed head symbolises the source of a symbiotic relationship with nature. In this respect, Orpheus' mysterious death would be to the Symbolist syncretism what the resurrection of Christ is to Christianity, that is to say the symbolic origin of a religion established as such. Of course, Christianity derives from the belief in a God, and in a dogma, whereas Symbolism is not a cult: the Symbolist syncretism stems from the belief in an Absolute, Art, and relies on a few essential principles, amongst which is the theory of synaesthesia and correspondences. In that, Orpheus appears as the symbol par excellence of those notions appropriated by Symbolism, while Prometheus embodies the very freedom of mind (which also engenders the creative power) that paves the way for the Symbolist fore-world. In contrast to Christ, who is an object of adoration and who is perceived by Christians as a guide and tangible historical figure towards which Christianity converges, Orpheus and Prometheus are only two elements in the body of symbols that constitutes Symbolism.

This specificity of Symbolism actually explains their association as substitutes for Jesus Christ. Although most Symbolist artists rejected Christianity, their culture was nonetheless Judo-Christian, and the image of Christ, in the pictorial, literary, and artistic field at large, had left its print on those artists, who tried to find a set of symbols to conjure up the evocative power that his image conveyed. The Prometheus

and Orpheus myths, which present many similarities with the story of Jesus Christ, were privileged symbols to conjure up such power, despite the fact that each myth only partially evoked the Christ's story. The nature of their association, in this respect, appears as complementary, bearing in mind that the elements from those myths that communicate with the Bible are the same episodes that appealed to the Romantics, before they transmitted this interest to the Symbolists. Now that we have put into perspective why Prometheus played such an important role within the Symbolist syncretism and what significance his figure could take in the context of the crisis of faith, notably through his association with Jesus Christ and Orpheus, it is now time to examine how the sets of symbols that he embodied during the Symbolist period took shape in artistic works of the time. We shall actually see that Prometheus did not lose his protean quality at the end of the nineteenth century, and that the treatment of his myth highlighted all the richness of the use of symbols at that time. Indeed, in the Symbolist context, homogenised by the common goal of reaching a fore-world, whatever form it took, the Promethean figure, although remaining protean, appeared as a coherent image. As we shall now examine it, Prometheus' image varied according to different criteria. But the multi-faceted aspect that the Titan took at the very end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century was not the symptom of a fragmentation of the symbol that he became. It did not mark the death of the Prometheus myth as such, after its transformation into a symbol. We should rather perceive the Prometheus symbol as a prism, whose facets condensed the various beams of representation of the Titan. It is

in order to perceive the coherence of the Prometheus figure behind his multiple masks that I decided to opt for a typology in the final chapter of this study.

IV. The Many Faces of Prometheus

The different facets Prometheus took at the turn of the nineteenth century derive, to a variable extent, from the different traits the Prometheus myth gained during its history and evolution. This explains why, in my 'typology', certain aspects of Symbolism or certain characteristics of the Promethean symbol that I previously examined will appear as partial criteria within its structure. The original traits of Prometheus' persona ('Prometheus the fire-giver', 'Prometheus the rebel', and 'Prometheus plasticator') will still be perceptible, even if on a symbolic level. Similarly, the religious borders that gave shape to the Symbolist map of Europe, as evoked in the previous chapter, are very visible in the artistic works that will be examined in order to determine Prometheus' various features at the turn of the century. Indeed, even as a symbol, Prometheus still results from the combination of those historical and cultural elements that take part in the constitution of myths.

This is why, amongst the different faces of Prometheus, I will distinguish a vitalist Titan, who essentially developed in Germany and in the countries that were culturally associated with it. Deriving from the original Prometheus plasticator, I will also consider the mask Prometheus took, especially in England, where there was a fertile intermingling with the Pygmalion myth. However, before observing these two facets of the Prometheus prism, I will return for the last time to the Symbolist Christianised Prometheus. Indeed, I will explore the way in which Symbolist artists, and most

notably Gustave Moreau, pushed the association between Prometheus and Jesus Christ to its limit, and used it to illustrate the Symbolist "désenchantement".

1. *Gustave Moreau, Prometheus and Jesus Christ*

The best way to understand the specificity as well as the value of the Symbolist association between Prometheus and Jesus Christ is by an examination of Gustave Moreau's paintings of Prometheus. Indeed, this Symbolist artist *par excellence* treated the subject of Prometheus several times, and his famous paintings undoubtedly played a very important part in the parallel drawn between Prometheus and Jesus Christ during the "fin de siècle" period. Moreover, the fact that he repeatedly used Prometheus as a source of inspiration, with different focuses, meant that Gustave Moreau thoroughly explored the significance the figure of the Titan could have within the Symbolist debate.

If we consider all the works executed by Gustave Moreau on the Prometheus theme, we can perceive a subtle use of the superimposed figure of Jesus Christ, a process through which Symbolist concerns seem to emerge. In this respect, from an aesthetic point of view, Moreau paved the way for other Symbolist artists. The most famous painting of Prometheus by Gustave Moreau dates from 1868, and is entitled Prométhée[391] (Fig.18).

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[391] Prométhée (1868), by Gustave Moreau, oil on canvas, 205 × 122 cm, Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris

Fig.18

The painting was first exhibited at the 1869 Salon in Paris, and was not a great success with the public. Prométhée remained unsold, in Gustave Moreau's studio. We may assume that, in some respects, such a treatment of the Titan would have seemed adventurous at that time. The pictorial tradition of portraying Prometheus' punishment, especially in France, was to emphasise Prometheus' unbearable suffering, inasmuch as the main focus on the Prometheus myth before the turn of the nineteenth century was on the chastisement of rebellion, from a theological and political perspective. We have to bear in mind that, after Titian and Rubens' striking paintings, highlighting the horror of his punishment, Prometheus, following the same approach , was usually depicted lying on his rock, contorted with pain. The revolution introduced by Shelley and Goethe regarding the interpretation of the myth had not yet reached the pictorial world. Interestingly enough, the main depictions of Prometheus during the first half of the nineteenth century were executed by academic painters in

search of great historical or mythical subjects, and not by artists of genius who could have projected a new perception of Prometheus onto the canvas. Thus, French artists like Pradier, Lehmann and Ribot made paintings on the subject of Prometheus Bound, using and reusing the focus that had been adopted to represent him since Titian's and Rubens' paintings. Even if Gustave Moreau used sketches of Pradier's sculpture of Prometheus,[392] portraying the Titan with his legs bent, he nevertheless chose to represent Prometheus in a straightened up, conquering position. Ignoring the vulture which devours his liver, Prometheus' piercing eyes stare into the distance,[393] as a reminder of the etymology of Prometheus ("foresight"). Like most of Moreau's characters, his Prométhée, both because of his posture and because of his athletic build, has the quality of a sculpture from Ancient Greece.[394] As a reminiscence of Hesiod, Prometheus is bound to a column. At his feet, we can see another dead vulture, which underlines his power as well as the prospect of his liberation.

However, the most striking feature of Gustave Moreau's Prométhée lies in his likeness to Jesus Christ. It is probably worth mentioning that Gustave Moreau, originally, was not inspired by Shelley, Goethe or Byron, but by Joseph de Maistre, whose writings put forward the idea that Prometheus was a prefiguration of Jesus Christ. Indeed, such an interpretation of the Pagan figure is elaborated upon in Joseph de Maistre's ninth dialogue of Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, of which Moreau had a

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[392] Prometheus, by Pradier, first exhibited at the 1827 Salon in Paris, is now in the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris

[393] Gustave Moreau himself described his Prométhée with the following words: "Like the pilot watching from the ship's prow, he gazes at the icy spaces in the distance, sounding all the horizons and smiling in his dream, while the blood flows from his side, under the thirsty beak of the ever insatiable vulture" (in the catalogue of the Gustave Moreau Museum, N°196)

[394] It is worth noting, here, that Gustave Moreau also made a statuette out of wax of Prometheus, represented in the same position as in this painting.

copy in his library. In a smaller version of Prométhée entitled Prométhée Enchaîné,[395] executed by Moreau in 1869, the painter inscribed in gold letters at the bottom of the canvas Prometheus' famous words from Prometheus Bound's opening scene, also quoted in Joseph de Maistre's work: VIDETE QUANTA PATIOR A DEO DEUS.[396] The choice of that quotation from Prometheus Bound seems far from fortuitous, since such words could have been pronounced by Jesus Christ himself when he felt abandoned by God. And indeed, Gustave Moreau's treatment of Prometheus emphasises all the likeness that might exist between the two characters. In actual fact, Moreau, in his painting, depicts Prometheus with a bleeding forehead, a characteristic which is peculiar to the Christian martyr, and not to the Pagan hero. Even though Prometheus, in the final painting, is suffused with light, notably because of a small symbolic flame surmounting his brow, Prometheus' head is not haloed as such. However, in sketches for Prométhée, this element of the painting was less allusive: in a drawing from 1868 which is of the same size as the final painting, Prometheus' head is haloed. Similarly, in a very small sketch,[397] Prometheus' 'holiness' is suggested by the wings of the vulture, whose position produces the clear impression that they belong to Prometheus. These pictorial processes were eventually not discarded by Gustave Moreau in the painting he exhibited at the 1869 Salon, but Prometheus' features, which are undoubtedly along the same line as the traditional depiction of Jesus Christ, are enough to draw a parallel between the Christian and the pagan figures. Even if the literary association between Prometheus and Jesus Christ had

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[395] Prométhée Enchaîné (1869), by Gustave Moreau, oil on canvas, 46 x 29 cm, private collection
[396] "See what I a god suffer at the hands of gods!"
[397] Studies for Déjanire et Prométhée, by Gustave Moreau, brown ink on tracing paper, around 1868, Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.

already been exploited in the 1860s, such a comparison was far from being common in the pictorial field during the 1860s.

However, this association is repeated fruitfully in other works by Gustave Morcau, and, in this respect, it is interesting to see what value the painter gave to the Titan. In one of his letters, dated 19th October 1868, Moreau evokes the weight of guilt that ineluctably seems to be the burden of mankind. To his friend, he mentions "the poetical traditions, which all situate at the beginning of mankind a golden age from which man is rejected because of his own fault. Do I have to remind you of this first revolt, symbolised by Prometheus?".[398] It is worth noticing that, even if Gustave Moreau came from a Catholic family, and therefore from a Judo-Christian background, the reference he chooses to illustrate the original sin is that of Prometheus, and not of the Bible. However, Gustave Moreau's references confirm what we have seen earlier when examining the Symbolist crisis of faith and the rejection of established religions. In order to build the Symbolist syncretism, Greek myths and "exotic imports" were substituted for the main cults. And Gustave Moreau's letter, in terms of cultural references, is particularly revealing, inasmuch as, to illustrate his point, the painter quotes Plato, who, because of his idealism, was so dear to the hearts of Symbolist artists. Thus, the French painter continues: "Talking about the moral human failing, he [Plato]says that: 'One has to blame the creator rather than the creature. Lord God of gods, seeing the human beings subjected to the generation had lost (or destroyed) in them the inestimable gift, determined to subject them to a treatment that would both punish and regenerate them.' Eventually, he says

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[398] Quoted in Gustave Moreau: 1826-1898, by Geneviève Lacambre, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1998, p.99

this remarkable thing: 'Nature and the abilities of Man have been changed and corrupted within him as early as his birth'."[399] We can notice two important things in Gustave Moreau's letter. Firstly, the fact that from a cultural point of view, the values we previously attributed to Symbolism are also his own, even if, in chronological terms, he appears as a precursor. Secondly, his depiction of Prometheus is unconventional, in the sense that his interpretation of the Titan operates on a symbolic level. Gustave Moreau, here, chooses Prometheus in order to epitomise mankind, which also allows him to give an instance of where the punishment for the original sin against the gods is faced, and not borne as a burden. To borrow Nietzsche's words again, Gustave Moreau, with his Prométhée, gives the "active sin" as an example, which also appears as a first step against the human feeling of guilt.

In this respect, Moreau's treatment of the subject reflects the turning-point initiated by Shelley and Goethe. By portraying Prometheus, Moreau attempts to represent the dawn of a new golden age, in which man would recognise that his responsibility is not involved in the original sin. His painting, in this respect, would symbolise the 'regeneration' of man, as quoted from Plato. Moreover, Gustave Moreau clearly pointed out the symbolic value he intended to give to his painting. Indeed, he stated that, with Prométhée, he wanted to show "the figure of a man of sacrifice and thought at grips, in life, with the torments and attacks of brutishness, and base matter".[400] The Promethean figure used by Gustave Moreau appears as the synthesis of the different symbols he took on, as a rebel, as the bearer of the fire of knowledge and Reason, and,

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[399] In Gustave Moreau: 1826-1898, by Geneviève Lacambre, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1998, p.100

[400] In the archives of the Musée Gustave Moreau, Holland-bound notebook, p.73

most of all, as the figurehead of Symbolist idealism against materialism. Surprisingly, art critics such as De Ponmartin did not see that Gustave Moreau's painting was the expression of a new approach to Prometheus, seeing on the canvas a faithful illustration of Æschylus' Prometheus Bound: " It is the first time that I am shown the Prometheus I had dreamt of: the wounded forehead, the chest bleeding, but with a serene face, because he is in possession of the gods' secrets, and because he knows that his immortal idea will survive to all those perishable divinities. A landscape of a great and austere beauty frames this scene worthy of Æschylus".[401] On the other hand, Théophile Gautier, who, with his Mademoiselle de Maupin, played an important role in the formation of Aestheticism, and, therefore, of Symbolism, immediately perceived the focus of Gustave Moreau's Prométhée. Such is his comment on the painting presented by Moreau at the 1869 Salon: " M. Gustave Moreau has not given his Prometheus the colossal proportions of Æschylus' Prometheus Bound. He is not a Titan. He is a man to whom it seems to us that the artist intended to lend some likeness with Jesus Christ, of whom, according to a few fathers of the Church, he is the type and object of the pagan prediction."[402] Indeed, Théophile Gautier, in his comment on Prométhée, identifies the very specificity of Gustave Moreau's painting, which is the parallel drawn between Prometheus and Jesus Christ. And the need that Théophile Gautier feels to trace the origin of such a parallel in history is also revealing of the fact that in France, at the end of the 1860s, the treatment of Prometheus as a Christianised character, in the pictorial field, was not common. But Gustave Moreau went even further in his interpretation of the Titan. Prométhée was

401 In *L'Univers Illustré*, Paris, 8th May 1869
402 In *L'Illustration*, Paris, 15th May 1869

only the first of a series of paintings on the subject of Prometheus, and Gustave Moreau, through it, was going to use all the strength the Promethean symbol could offer to a Symbolist sensitivity.

Pierre-Louis Mathieu, in his complete edition of Gustave Moreau's paintings, notes that "the two paintings he [Moreau] showed in 1869, Prometheus and Jupiter and Europa mark a backward step as compared with the more personal works discussed above [insert].They were carefully considered, highly finished pictures, designed for the salon, with all that implies of the artificial and conventional in the composition"[403]. Considering the originality of Gustave Moreau's treatment of Prometheus as opposed to previous French works of art based on the same subject, we have to disagree with Pierre-Louis Mathieu's statement on the "artificial and conventional" aspect of the painting. Moreover, Pierre-Louis Mathieu seems to imply that Moreau chose great mythical subjects in order to find favour with the jury. This may have been partly the case with Jupiter and Europa, but Gustave Moreau's repeated treatments of Prometheus, after 1869, suggest that the Titan represented much more to him than an academic subject, and that, far from it, Prometheus would have been, to him, one of the most personal subjects belonging with a few other figures and scenes which haunt his works, Salomé, Oedipus, and the Piétà being the most obvious. However, Prometheus also had a particular value within Moreau's work. More than a decade after the 1869 Salon, Moreau treated the subject anew,[404] and in a particularly interesting context. The painting we are alluding to bears the

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[403] In Gustave Moreau: Complete Edition of the Finished Paintings, Watercolours and Drawings, by Pierre-Louis Mathieu, Phaidon, Oxford, 1977, p.104.

[404] Moreau also repainted the upper left part of the original 1868 Prometheus in 1880.

same title as the 1868 original, and appears as a variation on it. Gustave Moreau actually executed his new Prometheus[405] between 1880-1885 in order to offer it to his friend Charles Ephrussi. The dimensions of Ephrussi's painting (18 × 11 cm), together with the fact that Gustave Moreau chose watercolours, cast a new light on the composition of Prométhée. As a matter of fact, although Gustave Moreau abandoned the "privileged academic features" (the very large dimensions and the use of oil on canvas), the composition of Prometheus remained the same. This choice alone is enough to prove that in Moreau's eyes, more than a decade after the 1869 Salon, Prometheus represented more than a perfectly executed painting fulfilling all the requirements of the "Academy". Moreover, the autograph inscribed on the back of the frame could also be a clear indication of the value Moreau attributed to the small watercolour. The autograph letter is as follows: "My dear Monsieur Ephrussi, Will you make me very happy and show me once again all your kind sympathy so often shown before? Place on your wall this small reminder of me. It will tell you always, however feebly, of the deep esteem and great affection that I have borne towards you." We could put forward the idea that Ephrussi himself asked Moreau to paint a reproduction of Prometheus for him, and that he therefore chose the subject of the painting. A second hypothesis would be that Moreau knew how much Ephrussi liked the original Prometheus, and that, in order to please his friend, he decided to paint a small version of it for him. However, Moreau's autograph letter lets us believe that Prometheus was not a commission at all, but simply a present from the painter to the Symbolist poet. In any case, Moreau's words are not fortuitous when he says that he

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[405] Prometheus (1880-1885), by Gustave Moreau, Watercolour with some white and gold highlights, 18 × 11 cm, private collection.

would like Prometheus to be seen by his friend as a "small reminder of [him]". He chose to give his friend this painting as representative of both his art and himself. Having said that, it seems impossible to uphold, with Pierre-Louis Mathieu, that the choice of Prometheus as a subject was a strategic one. To push the analysis of Moreau's autograph letter further, we could even venture the idea that there was some sort of identification between Moreau and Prometheus. However, if such relation existed in the mind of the painter, it had nothing to do with the sort of identification that united Victor Hugo and the Titan. In actual fact, the nature of the association between the French poet and Prometheus was mainly based on the heroism and greatness of character of the Greek figure, which particularly appealed to Hugo. In Moreau's case, and through his Symbolist sensitivity, the image of Prometheus was perceived on a different level, which gave shape to the various treatments of the Titan accomplished by the painter, as well as to the special connection between himself and his subject. In order to understand fully the nature of that connection, which will also allow us to define the value, in Symbolist eyes, of Prometheus when associated with Jesus Christ, it is now necessary to examine how Moreau's treatments of the Titan evolved.

As mentioned earlier, Moreau's main focus in the figure of the Titan is to present him as a christianised Prometheus. And, after the 1868 Prometheus, the likeness between the eponymous character and Jesus Christ increased. Indeed, the athletic build of Prometheus in the original painting disappeared in the later depictions of the same scene, the result of which was that, from being "Christ-like", Prometheus became a proper avatar of Jesus-Christ. Indeed, the way he was depicted gathered all

the features of the traditional representation of Jesus-Christ in Western Europe. But Gustave Moreau pushed further than a Shelley in literature the consequences of such an association between the Pagan and the Christian characters. It is often said that in terms of artistic trends, the pictorial arts are usually the last to reflect such movements. But Gustave Moreau did more than illustrate what the greatest European poets had written at the turn of the century, even if he was one of the first painters in Europe to take their work into account. Indeed, an unfinished painting entitled Prométhée Foudroyé, executed not too long after the 1868 Prométhée, certainly contains the key to the Symbolist association between Jesus Christ and Prometheus.

The composition of the painting is entirely different from the different versions of Prométhée examined earlier. Even if the setting is the same as that in Prométhée, and if the eponymous character is still at the centre of the painting, he is no longer in the foreground, and is encompassed in a wider view. Indeed, in Prométhée Foudroyé, Moreau adopted a form of pyramidal composition similar to that of his famous Jupiter and Sémélé. At his feet and on the inferior part of Prometheus' rock are represented ten lamenting oceanids. Such an organisation of the painting has the advantage of displaying a hierarchy, both spatial and symbolic. The godlike figure is in the upper part of the composition, and the only element above him, in the literal as in the figurative sense, is Jupiter's lightning, which strikes him. On the lower part of the painting, one of the oceanids, gripping Prometheus' left leg, looks at him with adoration, while another wrings her hands in despair. It is true that Gustave Moreau used a similar composition in other paintings, but the organisation of space within this painting also recalls the traditional depiction of the deposition of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, that reference must undoubtedly be taken into account when examining Prométhée Foudroyé. Indeed, the ten creatures on the sides of Prometheus' rock appear as many Maries and Mary-Magdalens at the foot of Jesus Christ's cross. We cannot but notice that, even if the setting and landscape are the same as in Prométhée, some of Prometheus' features have been altered. He does not sit on his rock anymore, but rests his body vertically on the rock, as if it were a cross. However, his right knee is bent, which emphasises the posture of Jesus Christ himself on his cross. What most strikingly links Prometheus to the Christian martyr, in Moreau's painting, is the Titan's face. Overwhelmed with pain and exhaustion, Prometheus cannot hold up his head, and closes his eyes. Even if we know that half of Prometheus' punishment lies in the fact that he is immortal, and that he has to bear his suffering indefinitely, Moreau gives to the Titan's face the expression of a man who, after a long agony, breathes his last. Nothing of his conquering attitude and strength is left from Prométhée. His martyrdom is actually emphasised by the fact that Prometheus' head, here again, is haloed. Moreover, a few subtle elements in the composition strengthen the parallel between the two martyrs. Behind Prometheus' head, the tracing of a cross is suggested by the shape given to the vulture's wings, placed at a right angle. Such a feature within the painting has a double interest. Not only does it strengthen the likeness between Prometheus and Jesus Christ, through a striking visual effect: it also creates the impression that the wings of the bird actually belong to Prometheus himself, which gives him an angelic quality.[406] Facing the combination of those

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[406] In Prométhée, Moreau had already considered using that effect, but only decided to use it as a feature of Prometheus in Prométhée Foudroyé, which, in the perspective of an association between him and Christianity,

specific features, which appear as a very conscious and sustained evocation of Jesus Christ's martyrdom, the question of the value this parallel took on for Moreau has to be raised.

Pierre-Louis Mathieu, understandably linking Prométhée and Prométhée Foudroyé, puts forward the idea that both paintings are literary paintings,[407] whose aim would be to be a faithful transposition of Æschylus' work into the pictorial field, or, at least, to the spirit of Æschylus' work, since the end of the trilogy in which Prometheus could have been struck by Jupiter's lightning was lost. The basics for such an understanding of Gustave Moreau's paintings would be the fact that the painter chose to apply on the canvas of Prométhée Enchaîné the quotation from Æschylus that we mentioned earlier. In actual fact, Pierre-Louis Mathieu suggests that "in an unfinished picture in the Gustave Moreau Museum [Prométhée Foudroyé] it is the dénouement of the tragedy that he represents, the moment when Prometheus was struck down by lightning, 'still holding the divine torch whose flame shall give light to the world'."[408] If it truly is the dénouement of Æschylus' tragedy that Moreau attempts to depict, as Pierre-Louis Mathieu seems to advance, Moreau is far from what Æschylus had intended, since, as mentioned in our first chapter, Æschylus probably had in mind a reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus, based on the repentance of Prometheus. However, even if in Prométhée Foudroyé, a winning Zeus strikes Prometheus down by lightning (as he threatens to do in Prometheus Bound), Moreau's commentary on his painting lets us believe that he does not try to represent the "moral dénouement" of

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might tend to prove that symbolically, according to Moreau, the association between the two characters is not entirely complete before the final punishment of Prometheus.

[407] In this respect, we all know the fame, not necessarily justified, of Gustave Moreau as a « literary painter ».

[408] In Complete Edition of the finished paintings, Watercolours and Drawings, by Pierre-Louis Mathieu, Phaidon, Oxford, 1977, p.106

Æschylus' trilogy by depicting another punishment of Prometheus. Moreau's Prométhée Foudroyé, I believe, must not be understood as a pictorial account of Æschylus, but as a symbolic scene. This is actually the interpretation that Moreau's own commentary invites us to make. By noticing that Prometheus "still [holds] the divine torch whose flame shall give light to the world", Gustave Moreau uses laudatory terms to describe the work of Prometheus, which proves that his interpretation of Prometheus is not a reading of Prometheus Bound that would focus on the question of rebellion and punishment. In this regard, the idea that Prométhée Foudroyé is not a literary painting can reasonably be upheld. Moreover, if Gustave Moreau had shared such an interpretation, the interweaving of Pagan and Christian elements within the painting would not have been significant.

On the other hand, the nature of the association of Jesus Christ with Prometheus is suggested in the second part of Gustave Moreau's commentary, when he mentions that "[Prometheus']flame shall give light to the world". Indeed, the light Moreau refers to is all symbolic. We have already frequently suggested what Prometheus' flame could represent on a symbolic level: the awakening of conscience, human feelings, but also the mastery of sciences, and the development of knowledge. We also briefly mentioned the fact that many positivists, from the first half of the nineteenth century, adopted Prometheus as an allegory in order to embody the omnipotence of sciences, and, consequently, of man.[409] However, these are certainly not the figurative meanings that we have to lend to Moreau's words. We have to bear

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[409] Pierre Albouy puts forward the idea that Ballanche initiated what Albouy calls "the St-Simonian fortune" of Prometheus: "The Titan becomes the hero of progress, which makes of man the master of the earth, the sea, and the sky". See Mythes et mythologies dans la littérature française, by Pierre Albouy, Armand Colin, Paris, 1969, p.161

in mind that, according to positivists, the nineteenth century, with its extraordinary scientific developments, was a century of accomplishments. In contrast, Moreau's use of the future tense (the divine torch whose flame shall give light to the world) appears enigmatic. Prometheus, according to positivists, was not a seer nor a prophet, but a fixed allegory of the triumph of man. If we now consider the way Prometheus is represented by Moreau in Prométhée Foudroyé, weakened and exhausted by his perpetual suffering, no sign of such a triumph can be perceived. Hence the problematical aspect of Moreau's words of hope. However, in this matter, the omnipresent reference to Jesus Christ is enlightening.

Both Jesus Christ and Prometheus sacrifice themselves for mankind, clinging to their love for humanity, and to their conviction that men are worth such a gesture. And we could assume that Moreau brings together Prometheus and Jesus Christ to emphasise their human side – which to a large extent leads them to martyrdom – in order to represent the aspirations of mankind. The fact that Jesus Christ as well as Prometheus are the symbols of a new potential world order would explain why Moreau, to a certain extent, identifies with Prometheus, since a new world order would primarily be the fruit of artistic creation. However, one also has to keep in mind that Moreau originally evoked the figure of the Titan in his notes, in order to define the weight of the original burden. Thus, the combination of a scene of crucifixion and Prometheus' punishment in Prométhée is very significant. Indeed, the sacrifices of Jesus Christ and Prometheus result from their unconditional love for mankind, but are also justified by the faith of the two martyrs in the potential of humanity. Jesus Christ expiates r sin in

the hope of regeneration, and Prometheus endures his punishment with the knowledge that a new era will come.

In this context, what Moreau seems to signify, in Prométhée Foudroyé, is the uncertain worthiness of mankind, which therefore questions the very possibility of a new world order, of the Symbolist ideal set against materialism or "vile matter", as Gustave Moreau himself put it. In Prométhée Foudroyé Prometheus still holds the torch, but the expression on his face seems to show that it is the end of his battle. And this questioning remains suspended, like Jupiter's lightning, which would symbolise the clinging of men to old sets of values, by fear of becoming their own creators. Prometheus, associated with Jesus Christ, would therefore embody the possibility of the realisation of the Symbolist ideal, the power of artistic creation, but also the acknowledgement of its very impotence. The evolution of the treatment of Prometheus in Gustave Moreau's paintings allows us to understand the meaning of the current association between Jesus Christ and the Titan. Indeed, it seems that during the "fin de siècle" in France, the Christianisation of Prometheus was just a mean to an end. The basis of the parallel between the Christian and the Pagan figures, for Symbolist artists, must actually be understood on another level, which is that both of them, through their sacrifice, embody the aspirations of mankind, and the hope for a new world. But in the difficult context of the late nineteenth century, in which Symbolist idealism clashed with the reality of industrial society, the synthesis between Prometheus and Jesus Christ is also emblematic of the "désenchantement" and, to a certain extent, of the impotence of the Symbolist artist. However, this mask of Prometheus was only one amongst many. In England and in Germany, where the

shock of the rise of the industrial society was perceived as less brutal, or at least, was not felt so deeply, the representations of Prometheus took other forms.

2. The Vitalist Prometheus

As mentioned in the previous section, when attempting to draw a Symbolist map of Europe, common aesthetic features were found to depend greatly on the particular nature of the crises Symbolists went through. This pattern encompassed cultural as well as geographical specificities, and it is therefore not surprising to note, that the Prometheus of the German artists (or ex-German artists, as we shall see) was quite different from the Belgian and French Prometheus. Having said that, there were many points of contact between Symbolist artists of various nationalities, and generalisation on this matter has to be kept at bay. The German artist Anselm Feuerbach, for example, who lived in Antwerp, Paris, Rome, and Venice, amongst other cities, painted Prometheus in a Christianised way (rather typical of Belgian and French artists). Indeed, his monumental painting, which was part of the ceiling frescoes commissioned from him in 1874 for the auditorium of the new academy building in Vienna, shows Prometheus in a manner which presents many similarities with Rubens' famous painting.[410] But, as with Moreau's Prométhée Foudroyé, the pictorial use made by Feuerbach of the Oceanids in Der gefessette Prometheus, von den Okeaniden Beklagt[411] produces a strong parallel between the mythological characters and the Maries. This allowed Manfred Krüger to name Feuerbach's painting of

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[410] Such a form of homage is not surprising given the fact that Feuerbach studied and copied Rubens assiduously in the Munich Pinakothek.

[411] Der Gefessete Prometheus, von den Okeaniden Beklagt, by Anselm Feuerbach, 1879, oil on canvas, oval, 220 cm × 375 cm, Akademie des Bildendedn Künste, Vienna

Prometheus a "Vor-Bild Christi",[412] a "model of Christ". The "Christianisation" of Prometheus was not strictly limited to Belgium and France. However, we can also put forward the idea that Jesus Christ was often depicted in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century[413] (we can most notably think here of the Beuron School and of Franz Von Stuck), but that, generally speaking, there was no cross-fertilisation there between Jesus Christ and the Prometheus myth.

Let us now consider the treatment of Prometheus by German-speaking artists at the end of the nineteenth century , and the nature of their defining vitalism.

a. Towards a Golden Age

Two important elements of the Reich must be taken into account here in order to understand why the idealism of German-speaking Symbolist artists was very often expressed through the imagery of a form of Greco-Roman golden age. The first is the cultural and political context of countries that had been part of Germany during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The second is the great importance of two German philosophers already mentioned in the present work: Friedrich Nietzsche and, to a certain extent, Karl Marx. As far as the history is concerned, the creation of the German Reich was the origin of a deep cultural identity crisis. All German people were concerned, inasmuch as this creation initiated many structural changes: liberalism, industrialism and prosperity arose, together with the effects that they had on Symbolist minds through Europe. But to that general background was added the

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412 In Wandlungen des Tragischen, by Manfred Krüger. Drama und Initiation, Stuttgart, 1973, p.52

413 It is worth noting that German representations of Jesus Christ challenged the traditional religious depictions, adopting new angles. See "Faith and Damnation" by Hans H. Hofstätter, in Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920, edited by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, pp. 131-141.

fact that regional idiosyncrasies tended to fade out in favour of the great German Reich. Even more disturbing, people who were born in Germany, like Arnold Böcklin, had become Swiss. The sense of dislocation at the origin of Symbolism was therefore very strong for German or ex-German artists. However, even if they felt that their cultural identity was disintegrated, it is interesting to see that those artists retained the same points of reference. Indeed, the philosophy developed by Nietzsche appeared as an inspiration for them. The fact that many of them created works devoted to the philosopher is certainly not fortuitous. Very often, the way in which they treated subjects, or the very choice of their subjects was inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche. In actual fact, one of the specific features of Germanic Symbolist artists is that they did not turn towards a syncretism in order to resolve their spiritual crisis. On the other hand, it seems that they put their faith in man and his power, following the ideas of Nietzsche, as well as Marx, who did not have a direct influence on Symbolists, but who put forward the same faith in the abilities of mankind during the same period. In that, he contributed to the advance of such a conception. Because the faith of Germanic Symbolist artists was directed towards man and not towards substitutes for God, the expression of their idealism took a special form. In actual fact, as if to address the cultural crisis they were going through, and to go back to their roots, they often turned towards Nordic or Greek myths in order to depict a form of golden age, or, to borrow the words of Simon Reynolds, inspired by a painting by Thomas Eakins,[414] of Arcadia.[415]

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[414] Arcadia, by Thomas Eakins, c.1880, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
[415] "The Longing for Arcadia", by Simon Reynolds, in Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920, edited by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, pp. 53-59. It

Germanic Symbolist artists from the 1870s until the end of the century often expressed their idealism in the form of a green, luxurious landscape, in which – often naked – men enjoyed simple pleasures. It is interesting to consider that through that aesthetic, those artists actually followed a long German tradition – epitomized by Romantic artists such as Caspar David Friedrich – depicting a man facing a landscape in order to reflect man's state of mind (usually the Romantic *angst*). Indeed, it seems that Germanic Symbolist artists also made symbolic use of the landscape, if in a slightly different manner. They did not really attempt to depict a state of mind, usually arising from a confrontation with a sublime eternal landscape, at the origin of the Romantic angst. The landscape, in their compositions, appeared as the sign of a symbiotic alliance with man. The Symbolist arcadia thus created was a sort of Eden without religious connotations, a new golden age. In this context, we can assume that the use that they made of myths was based on the cyclical power of myths, an aspect which will be important when considering the Germanic interpretation of the Prometheus myth. In actual fact, we have based our study of the Titanic figure on the idea that the evolution of the Prometheus myth throughout the nineteenth century was not governed by such a cyclical power, but on a linear historical evolution of its various patterns, which eventually led to Prometheus becoming a symbol. However, the fact that Germanic painters used the cyclical, and therefore timeless, aspect of myths to retreat into their specific idealism is not incompatible with what Prometheus had become at that stage.

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is particularly interesting to consider that Simon Reynolds put forward the idea that "Goethe's classicism was no more than the first faltering step to a German Arcadia" (p.53).

If we observe representative "Arcadian" works by the most important Germanic Symbolist artists, such as Lovers in front of a Shrubbery,[416] A Tavern in Ancient Rome,[417] The Spring of Love,[418] by Arnold Böcklin, Evening,[419] by Max Klinger, and the great majority of the works executed by Hans Von Marées and Ludwig Von Hofmann, what marks out the scenes depicted is perfect, unthreatened harmony, in which the beauty of unspoilt Nature is echoed by the perfection of young bodies. It goes without saying that, because of its intrinsic violence, the Prometheus myth, whatever may be its interpretation, could not be pictorially treated in such an "Arcadian" way. However, painters for whom Arcadia played an important part, like Böcklin and Max Klinger, also painted works on Prometheus, which entitles us to wonder whether a link can be established between the mythological character, and the idealised golden age of Arcadia.

The Germanic treatment of the Prometheus myth, although aesthetically different from that in other European countries, was, on the other hand, very close to theirs from a symbolic perspective. Indeed, even if Germanic Symbolist artists used myths mainly because they could be extracted from history, as well as to convey the idea of a terrestrial paradise without conjuring up religion, it appears that the choice of Prometheus as a subject was not governed by the same intention. As far as French and Belgian paintings were concerned, we could observe that the Symbolist fore-world was almost always depicted as something towards which Symbolist artists had to

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[416] Liebespaar vor Bushwerk (Lovers in Front of a Shrubbery), (c.1864) by Arnold Böcklin, tempera on canvas, 74 × 98 cm, Kunsthaus, Zurich

[417] Altrömische Weinschenke (A Tavern in Ancient Rome), (1867/1868) by Arnold Böcklin, oil on canvas, 65 × 96.5 cm, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

[418] Liebesfrühling (The Spring of Love), (1868) by Arnold Böcklin, oil on canvas, 220 × 136 cm, Städtlische Kunstsammlung, Darmstadt

[419] Evening, (1882) by Max Klinger, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt

strive, even if such an idealism, facing the tangible industrial and materialistic world, was actually doomed. In this respect, the paintings that represented this abstraction had a dream-like as well as nostalgic quality. We also put forward the idea that Prometheus, through his act of resistance, symbolised the possibility for man to enter the Symbolist fore-world. Germanic Symbolist Arcadian paintings differ from these inasmuch as their fore-world was not depicted as a dream, but with a strong vitalism. Such a distinctive pattern might be explained by the fact that, whereas French and Belgian painters mainly felt their faith (in the broad meaning of the term) crumble, Goethe, followed by Marx and Nietzsche, had established a faith in man. Hence, one could assume, the unchallenged energy arising from Arcadian paintings, which express this new faith. Prometheus, in this context, had for Germanic Symbolist artists the same value as the Titan had for Nietzsche, and – through a different philosophical development – Marx. Indeed, Prometheus' rebellion represented the awakening of mankind, and the discovery of their own power, which led Prometheus himself to become the symbol of the rebirth of man, as well as the model of this new generation of active men. Prometheus was a subject dear to the hearts of Germanic painters inasmuch as he symbolised the condition of existence, and very origin of Arcadia. However, depending on the features that the Symbolist fore-world might have, the treatment of the Prometheus subject took various aesthetic forms, which we now have to examine in detail with three major works on Prometheus, by Arnold Böcklin, Max Klinger, and Rudoph Jettmar.

b. Variations on the rebirth of man.

Arnold Böcklin's Prometheus

The close relationship existing between man and Nature in Arcadian paintings is also strikingly present in Arnold Böcklin's painting entitled Prometheus (Fig.19),[420] even though we can certainly not talk of a symbiotic relationship between the Titan and the landscape created.

Fig.19

Henry Thode, in 1905, said of Böcklin's work: "In Böcklin's paintings we can see two different worlds merge into one. We have become acquainted with them – the one represents the pictorial ideal of modern landscape, the other the sculptural ideal of classical man. He is incorporated into a landscape which corresponds to the need of modern man to see himself mirrored in nature".[421] This comment appears to be entirely adequate in its description of Böcklin's Arcadian paintings, and it also highlights what is at stake in Prometheus. In this composition, it looks as if the Titan

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[420] Prometheus, (1882) by Arnold Böcklin, oil on Canvas, 116 × 150 cm, Collezione Barilla d'Arte Moderna, Parma.

[421] Quoted in Böcklin, by Hans Dollinger, Bruckmann, München, 1975, p.33

is attempting to free himself, or, one could even say, extract himself from Böcklin's atmospheric landscape. Indeed, Prometheus, in this painting, seems to be fighting against matter. The Swiss painter actually chose to give Prometheus his proper Titanic dimension, so that he appears to be part of the rocky mountains to which he is bound. Such an impression is emphasised by the way in which the light is represented in the painting, filtering through clouds, and only brightening up a few elements of the composition. Because of this, it is even more difficult to distinguish Prometheus from the mountain. Moreover, Prometheus is viewed from below, and blends into the cloudy sky, which, again, accentuates the impression that he belongs to the mountain. It is also worth noticing that elements from the original myth are not depicted in Böcklin's paintings, which changes our focus on the painting. Even though Prometheus is represented as bound to his rock, the vulture/eagle is not depicted in Böcklin's Prometheus. Such a choice can be justified by the assumption that the painter wanted to emphasise the symbol within Prometheus, more than the myth itself. By trying to liberate himself from the unity he forms with the chaotic landscape, it looks as if Böcklin actually chose to represent, through that particular image of Prometheus, the symbolic rebirth of man.

Indeed, by creating an atmospheric landscape in which the elements are shown in a tortured way that reflects Prometheus' struggle, Böcklin gave a cosmogonic quality to his mysterious scenery. The raging sea, the purple clouds, and the beams of sun which break through the sky give the general impression that something is in gestation. All these elements act within the paintings as various harmonies which work towards creating a deeply evocative and symbolic image. Böcklin's Prometheus, in this respect, appears as a Symbolist painting *par excellence*, and meets the requirements that he

himself had set for an accomplished painting. Indeed, in 1897, he said that "a painting should tell something and give the person looking at it food for thought just as much as poetry does, and convey to him an impression as does a piece of music"[422]. It is actually striking to consider how Prometheus, like a piece of music, grips the viewer with its immediacy. Such an impression is strengthened by the fact that, in this painting, Prometheus is given the gigantic size that was attributed to him in original accounts of the myth. And, for this reason, the painting is also strangely reminiscent of Greek creation myths, those occurring before the time of the Olympian gods[423]. We could actually put forward the idea that the pictorial power of Prometheus lies in the fact that the struggle of the Titan, above all, appears as the expectation of a tremendous event. Prometheus' very convulsion has the intensity of a birth, although the liberation that is at stake here is of a symbolic nature. The landscape, where Böcklin's composition clearly reflects the Titan's torment, is transforming itself. The enigmatic aspect of the scene created by Böcklin actually comes from its timelessness, in the sense that a cosmogony is involved. The treatment of the natural elements, and, most of all, of the light, which seems to be about to reveal an essential mystery, gives a chaotic aspect to the painting. Again, a new world order seems to be arising. Böcklin's painting, in that respect, could be perceived as a primeval, an original scene, the essence of which would be Prometheus' liberation. Prometheus is the painting of the

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[422] In Böcklin, by Hans Dollinger, Bruckmann, München, 1975, p.12

[423] William Vaughan, in Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920, edited by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, p.89, mentions that "In forging his own image of Prometheus bound to the rock, Böcklin is believed to have been influenced by a classical wall painting of Tityus, a giant in Greek mythology who suffered a similar fate.", to which he adds, further, that the "image of Prometheus[...] also bears a similarity to that of the blinded Cyclops in Turner's famous scene from Homer, *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus*". These remarks are particularly interesting if we take into account that Prometheus, as depicted by Böcklin, has an original mythological quality which allows the symbolism of the scene to develop fully.

Titan's birth as a free being. By liberating himself from the matter of the rocky mountain, Prometheus also symbolically allows self-awareness to expand. In that, Prometheus could be seen as the strong pictorial expression of one of the major ideas that developed in German philosophy at that time. In Marx's work, through his action on matter, man frees himself from it and gains self-awareness. Indeed, in Böcklin's painting, because of the link between the landscape and Prometheus' struggle, the Titan seems to be about to rise to a new life, and a new world. It is in this respect that the scene could be considered as the original scene preceding, in Germanic Symbolist thought, the Arcadian world. The justification of Prometheus' fight would be the foundation of an ideal realm in which men, freed from the tyranny of matter and all it represents, enjoy perfect harmony with a landscape reminiscent of the golden age. As mentioned earlier, Böcklin, to endow his painting with such an evocative power, gave an immediacy to the Symbolism of the scene, in a manner close to that of the musical medium, which was the model art for Symbolist artists. The association between Prometheus and music was also used by Max Klinger, in a highly original manner that we have now to examine.

Max Klinger's Brahms' Fantasy (op. XII)

Music, as part of the great idea of the "*gesamtkunstwerk*", was of tremendous importance in the work of Max Klinger, who mastered the art of drawing in the Germanic world in the 1870s. Max Schmid wrote of him: "He loves an aphoristic Nietzschean style; or, put in musical terms, to state a theme, preceded by a prelude, which he then subjects to manifolds variations, interrupts with digressions, and finally brings to a close, usually with a grand crescendo but sometimes with a soft

diminuendo".[424] A passion for music as a model art appeared very early in Klinger's career as an artist when he applied traditional musical classification to his works. He actually classified his early Etched Sketches (1879) as Opus I, and carried on using that system until his death in 1920. Max Klinger was greatly inspired by Richard Wagner, who showed him the direction art should take with the concept of the *gesamtkunstwerk*. This was the case even though the artist was part of a circle of friends which included Robert Schumann, and, most important of all, Johannes Brahms, who were far from pursuing Symbolism in art. In a way, it is equally surprising to consider that Max Klinger, who was so much attracted to the concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*, essentially expressed himself through drawings. Nevertheless, the accomplishment of the total work of art, in his mind, seemed to rely on a musical achievement through the pictorial medium, and he succeeded in his ambition.

Amongst all his works, Klinger's cycle on Prometheus is the most closely associated with music, both through its title, and through its content. The cycle, indeed, is entitled Brahms Fantasy (opus XII)[425] (even though there is no evidence that Brahms composed any work on the Prometheus theme), and is composed of three paintings: Evocation (Fig.20),[426] The Abduction of Prometheus (Fig.21),[427] and Prometheus Unbound (Fig.22).[428]

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[424] In Max Klinger, by Max Schmid, Bielefeld, Leipzig (5th ed.), 1926, p.1

[425] Brahms Fantasy (opus XII), (1890-1894) by Max Klinger, Muzeum Narodowe Poznan

[426] Evocation, (1894) by Max Klinger, etching, aquatint, mezzotint, engraving, 29.2 × 35.7 cm, Muzeum Narodowe Poznan.

[427] Entführung des Prometheus (The Abduction of Prometheus), (1894) by Max Klinger, etching, aquatint, engraving, 27.8 × 38.2 cm, Muzeum Narodowe Poznan.

[428] Der Befreite Prometheus (Prometheus Unbound), (1894) by Max Klinger, etching, aquatint, mezzotint, engraving, 27.6 × 36.2 cm, Muzeum Narodowe Poznan.

The first drawing, Evocation, which is also one of the most famous prints by Klinger, sets the tone, atmosphere, as well as the significance of the entire cycle. Schmid would put forward that it is the "prelude" of the cycle.

Fig.20

On a veranda overlooking the sea, a man, dressed in modern style, plays the piano in a passionate manner, and turns in a rather stupefied way towards a figure invoked by the music, a naked woman, who, as Rolf Günther puts it, is "a personification of nature, playing a huge harp. Her gown and mask have fallen away to reveal nature unveiled, pure, as being the source of all art".[429] That representation is particularly interesting in the Symbolist context, since such a conception of nature was at the centre of the Symbolist understanding of the world. We mentioned in a previous chapter that the theories of Symbolism on philosophy and art were remarkably influenced by the myths, legends, and religion of the far-East.[430] And one image in particular became central in Symbolist poetry, especially in France: that of Maïa, the

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[429] In Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920, edited by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, p.218

[430] We notably mentioned the importance of Schopenhauer in the import of those "exotic" philosophies, ideas, and symbols.

Hindu goddess of illusion, who was also the embodiment of nature.[431] The most interesting aspect of this figure is that Maïa was represented with a veil. We can then understand why that figure appealed so much to Symbolist artists, since it conveyed, through a symbolic representation, both the idea that the immediate, material world was nothing but an illusion, and the belief the truth was in an ideal fore-world. The image of Maïa, named as such or not, spread to a very large extent in Europe through all artistic fields, and Evocation is one depiction of her, associated with other symbols dear to the Symbolists' hearts. In the background, over the sea, the sky is dominated, almost as a watermark, by Titans, who, as Rolf Günther notes, "symbolise the threatening forces of nature".[432] It is worth noting here that Prometheus cannot be identified amongst them. They are treated as symbols in Klinger's composition, and the value he gives to the figure of Prometheus within the cycle is of a different nature, and is not delivered through the immediacy of a symbolic image, as in Böcklin's Prometheus. There is indeed a linearity that has to be followed in the Brahms Fantasy if one is to understand the meaning of the treatment of the Prometheus subject. We could perhaps venture to say that the final harmony has to be heard to apprehend the value of the cycle. It is probably here that the originality of Klinger's treatment of the Prometheus myth lies. The cycle can *a priori* appear as the partial account of the original myth, inasmuch as Prometheus is never represented on his own in the painting. However, because of Evocation, we cannot ignore the fact that Klinger attempted to – and succeeded in –giving a general symbolic and Symbolist quality to his Brahms

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[431] The poet Leconte de Lisle, in France, was the first to invoke that figure, along with that of Brahma, in his 1852 Poèmes Antiques.

[432] In Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920, edited by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, p.218

Fantasy. In Evocation, through the invocation of Maïa and the power of music, the sea and other forces of nature are stirred as if by magic, which directs the general interpretation of the Brahms' Fantasy cycle.

In The Abduction of Prometheus, Klinger depicts Hermes and Zeus' eagle above the sea, carrying Prometheus towards the rock to which he will be bound. As Rolf Günther puts it, the "image [is]suffused with an almost surrealist atmosphere".[433]

Fig.21

The flying group formed by Hermes, the eagle and Prometheus, whose face is hidden in his arms, creates a rather striking image, whose movement is strengthened by the general composition of the drawing. Klinger actually plays on shadows and on the contrast of black and white to increase both the impression of speed, and the illusion that they are flying towards an open space. The two men and the bird, who leads the party with his penetrating beak, are positioned in a conic way (Hermes leaning forward) which contrasts with a second inverted cone of light created by the clouds and their reflection on the sea. The fasces of this cone of light originate from the sea-shore on the left of the drawing. The Abduction of Prometheus has to be examined under the

[433] *Ibid.*, p.219

light of the entire cycle, and especially under that of the final drawing in order to understand all its implications in the perspective of Klinger's interpretation of the Prometheus myth.

In Prometheus Unbound, the main character of the drawing appears to be the invincible Herakles, who has just freed Prometheus from his torment.

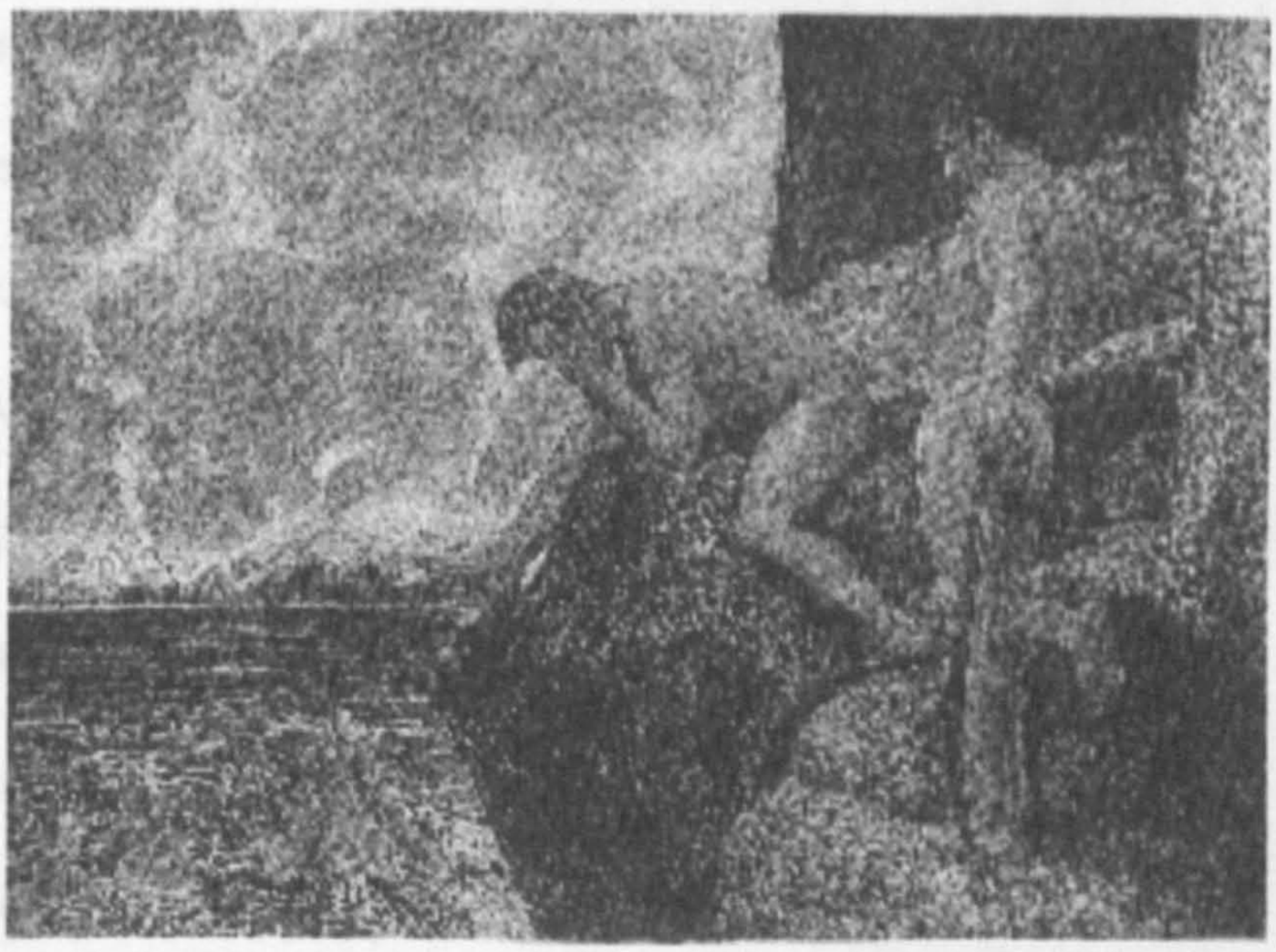

Fig.22

Prometheus, who is in the middle of the drawing, has his head in his hands, probably crying with relief, and sits on the rock as if to recover slowly from his endless martyrdom. Herakles, with his bow, stands back on the right of the foreground, and looks at Prometheus with a smile. In this drawing of Prometheus' liberation, the conqueror is Herakles and not the Titan himself, who appears as a broken man. In the background, on the left, Oceanids and sea creatures are looking in a bewildered way at the free Titan, probably amazed by Herakles' exploit. In this respect, it would be inaccurate to say that in this Prometheus cycle, Prometheus symbolises the rebirth of man, the focus of the Brahms Fantasy clearly being Herakles' glorious gesture. It is

surprising that, in a series of paintings on Prometheus, there is in fact no depiction of the actual punishment of the Titan. Through the absence of such a drawing and through the special focus and perspective of the drawings, keys are given for the interpretation of the Brahms Fantasy.

The Titan, as such, is not the conqueror of a new world or the instigator of a new era for mankind, but, because he is freed by Herakles, his liberation foretells new times for men. Indeed, we have to bear in mind that Klinger was a great admirer of Nietzsche and his thought, and there is no doubt that the Brahms Fantasy refers to the Birth of Tragedy. As we noted earlier, Evocation puts the focus of the cycle on the power of music, confirmed by the final drawing, Prometheus Bound. It is certainly not fortuitous that Nietzsche, in The Birth of Tragedy, concludes his pages on Prometheus by saying: "What power was it that freed Prometheus from his vultures and transformed the myth into a vehicle of Dionysian wisdom? It is the Heracleian power of music".[434] It is probably worth remembering here that Prometheus was, according to Nietzsche, out of the Apollonian order, which, in the Prometheus myth, is embodied by Zeus. For this reason, he appears as a threatening force, and therefore has to be punished. The Titans in Evocation, in this respect, are also symbolic of that creeping threat. Quoting Goethe, Nietzsche interprets the value of the Prometheus figure by saying that "The immeasurable suffering of the bold "individual" on the one hand and the divine predicament and intimation of a twilight of the gods on the other, the way the power of these two worlds of suffering compels a reconciliation, a metaphysical union".[435] In Nietzsche's thought as well as in the Brahms Fantasy, this occurs through the

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[434] In The Birth of Tragedy, by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1967, p.75
[435] *Ibid.*, p.70

Heracleian musical power. The antagonism between the Apollonian order and Prometheus is clearly represented through the opposition of The Abduction of Prometheus and Prometheus Bound, and through the twilight of the gods, crowned by the musical liberation, already announced by Evocation, in which the forces of nature are smouldering. In this regard, the Brahms Fantasy is the depiction of the glory of the Heracleian force, but, above all, of the omnipotent power of music. We could say that Klinger's Prometheus cycle is in fact very close to a *gesamtkunstwerk*, inasmuch as philosophy, literature, music, and of course striking images, are combined in his work to give it all its evocative strength. To go further, the cycle appears as a *mise en abyme* of the very aim of Symbolism art, which is to reach the harmony of the ideal fore-world (here inaugurated by Prometheus' liberation by Herakles) through a pure medium of which music is the model. Thus, we could conclude by saying that Prometheus, for Klinger, is an instrument, being part of a set of symbols which tends towards the rebirth of man in a world where the main orders are reconciled. Although Rudolph Jettmar's life as an artist was influenced by music as well as the art of Böcklin, his two different interpretations of Prometheus also prove to be an original treatment of the myth.

Rudoph Jettmar's two Prometheus

The link Rudolph Jettmar established between music and fine art is not as apparent in his work as it can be in Max Klinger's, but it is nonetheless at the very origin of his art. This is why, before examining his actual drawings executed on the Prometheus theme, it may be fruitful to consider first how Rudolph Jettmar apprehended myths and music. Indeed, as Hans Von Hofstaetter put it, the Austrian artist, "gifted, as he was, for both

arts, [...] was undecided between music and painting for a long time. As a matter of fact, he never did make that decision: although he became a painter and etcher, he also remained captured by music throughout his life. At the time of his death he was an honorary member of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and also an honorary member of the Vienna Philarmonic Orchestra. It is in this double membership that the two poles of his life find their expression".[436] In actual fact, it is in the very conception he had of his art that he associated music and drawing, which explains why music was not used by Jettmar as a reference, or as a model to strive towards. It was at the root of his work. The two dominant elements in his work were landscape and mythology, which, for him, were musical traits. Hans Hofstaetter points out that "the recurrent themes" that we find in Jettmar's work are mythological figures, amongst whom are Phaedon, Prometheus, and, most of all, Hercules: "they have a particular appeal to musical persons, because they hear in a way from within these paintings and etchings the music that inspired their creator".[437] This can be literally true of Prometheus, inasmuch as many of the greater composers were inspired by the Titan and his various literary treatments. However, we probably have to understand that point in a more general way. Those mythological figures were linked to music because of what they embodied. Indeed, here, we can concur with Hofstaetter,[438] who put forward the idea that Jettmar shared with the Romanticists the conception that music stemmed from myths. The artist actually perceived in music the expression of a godlike and immortal power. However, unlike many artists, and particularly Romantic artists, he did not see the

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[436] In Rudolph Jettmar : Monographie, by Hans H. Von Hofstaetter, Tusch, Vienna, 1984, p.55

[437] *Ibid.*

[438] „Jettmar ist damit der musikalischen Kunstanschauung der Romantik verpflichtet, die ihre Grundlagen letztlich aus der Antike herleitet, in der die Musik mythischen Ursprungs war; die Anwesenheit der Götter in der Musik bewirkt ihre besondere Macht „ in Hofstaetter, p.12

faceless Christian God behind the great mystery of music, but the Greek gods from ancient mythology. It seems that to Jettmar the cosmic power of myths was inseparable from that of music, which reflects in an immaterial way the elementary and mysterious forces of the world. And this is this original conception of Jettmar that we have to bear in mind in order to understand the nature of his graphic work.

Jettmar's first drawing on the Prometheus theme is entitled Die Befreiung des Prometheus[439] and was executed in 1910. We can feel in this drawing the influence of Klinger, whom Jettmar admired greatly. However, although there are similarities between the art of Klinger and that of Jettmar, the latter attributed a greater importance, and, we could even say, a symbolic importance, to light and shadows in his drawings, an aspect especially striking in Die Befreiung des Prometheus (Fig.23).[440]

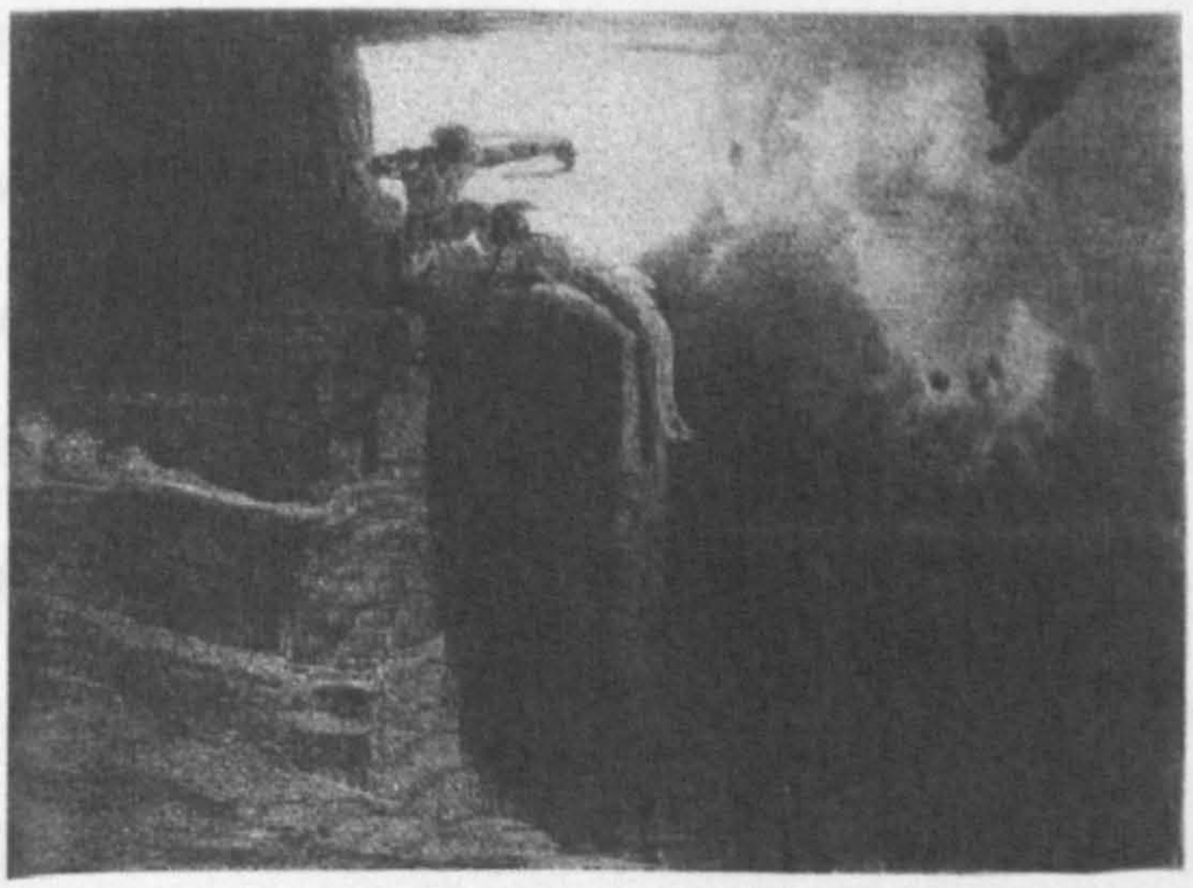

Fig.23

The opposition between black and white in Prometheus is doubled with an opposition between the left part of the drawing and its right section, separated in the exact middle

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[440] Die Befreiung des Prometheus (The Freeing of Prometheus), (1910) by Rudolph Jettmar, etching and dry-point, 60.1 × 79.7 cm, Private Collection.

of the composition by Prometheus' body. On the left side is the rock to which Prometheus is bound. Its contours on the bottom left corner stand out from the dark. In the upper and opposite part of this section of the drawing are Hercules and Prometheus, on a promontory with a vertical slope. Both men are surrounded by light, Hercules kneeling behind Prometheus in order to kill the vulture – situated at the top right corner of the composition – with his bow. Prometheus, his head held up and pressed against Hercules' leg, faces his tormentor. His body, however, threatens to fall into the abyss, and his exhaustion is perceptible in the movement of his hands and the fact that he cannot hold his head himself. In the right section of the painting, we can perceive with difficulty, amidst the darkness, the level of the sea and the raptor which dominates it.

Because of the clear opposition between light and darkness, emphasised by the division into two of the drawing, the function Jettmar attributes to the use of black and white in his composition is very apparent. Hercules and Prometheus are on the side of the light, which seems to spread in the direction of the vulture – as the arrow that is about to kill it flies in the air – whereas in the right part of the composition, everything is in darkness. In this respect, black and white here give a Manichean value to Jettmar's drawing, and show in a very vivid way the clash between the fair rebellion of Prometheus and the dark, doomed world of Zeus and the Olympian Gods. The fact that the balance of Die Befreiung des Prometheus relies on two "schematic" oppositions – that of the use of black and white and that of the equal division of the drawing – could have produced a rather flat work. However, Jettmar's drawing is deeply atmospheric, and the way Prometheus is depicted plays an essential role in this achievement. I actually find that it is one of the strongest and most poignant depictions examined in

the present thesis. The lower part of his body is dangling in the abyss, which symbolically shows that he has to endure the punishment of Zeus and his ruling. In that, he has to submit to his fate. But if we keep in mind that the lights reflect Manicheism and the two fighting world orders, the fact that Prometheus is partly in the darkness of the void also represents his belonging to divinity and to mankind, which Hercules represents here. However, the most striking feature of the way in which Prometheus is represented by Jettmar lies in what his body expresses. He is certainly bound to a rock, but the way he holds himself is very meaningful. His body is exposed and is abandoned to the power of the vulture. His muscles are relaxed, and not convulsed. Only the twitching of his right hand is an indication of his suffering, and the fact that maintaining his head up along Hercules' left leg is an intense effort for him. However, his head is up, accompanying the movement Hercules executes to kill the vulture, and, following the arrow, he stares defiantly at his torturer. Even if he submits to his punishment, knowing its outcome, Prometheus does not surrender and still defies the Olympian gods. We could say that, because of the very manner in which the drawing was executed, as well as the importance of music, notably through the introduction of the figure of Hercules in these two treatments of Prometheus, Klinger's Brahms' Fantasy and Jettmar's Die Befreiung des Prometheus present similarities in their approach to Symbolism. Indeed, both used Greek mythology in their work in order to conjure up the idea of a totality inextricably linked to the primordial power of music, so dear to the hearts of Symbolists.

Six years after the completion of Die Befreiung des Prometheus, in 1916, Jettmar undertook a second drawing related to the Prometheus theme in order to make a diptych on the subject of the Titan. However, as Hofstaetter put it, "the second volet

does not have the elemental power of the previous one".[441] Jettmar actually had a five-year break in his career as an artist, during which he taught art at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna, and the first important work that he completed when he started drawing again was this rather academic composition. Interestingly enough, the second drawing he made on the Prometheus myth is entitled Prometheus bringt den Menschen das Feuer (Fig.24)[442], and refers to an earlier episode within the myth, since it depicts the Titan's original gift of fire to mankind.

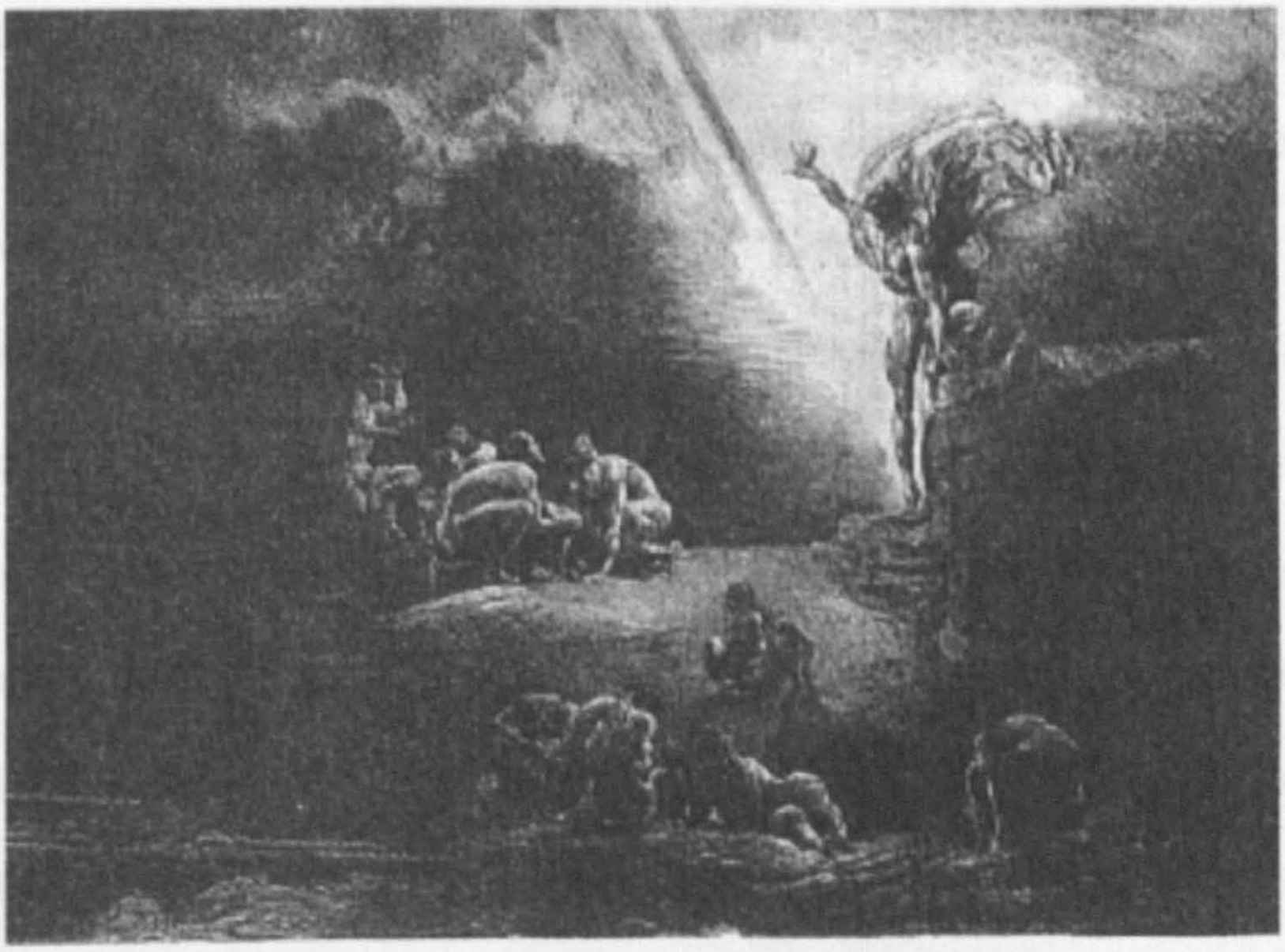

Fig.24

In the composition of his drawing, Jettmar makes use, again, of the opposition between black and white, light and shadows, but its value is not as strong as in Die Befreiung des Prometheus. Indeed, if Prometheus is surrounded by light in the second drawing, it is because of Zeus' lightning, which slants from the sky, and whose power lifts up

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[441] In Rudolph Jettmar: Monographie, by Hans H. Von Hofstaetter, Tusch, Vienna, 1984, p.49. My translation.
[442] Prometheus bringt den Menschen das Feuer (Prometheus brings fire to men) (1916), by Rudolph Jettmar, 540 × 748 mm, private collection.

Prometheus' draped cloth. He stands up on the highest point of the rock, forming the centre of the composition with Zeus' lightning. At his feet, primitive men and women –some of them clearly in despair, like the isolated prostrated figure at the bottom right corner of the drawing – are squatting. A group of men on the left unsuccessfully attempt to build a fire, and they turn, half-scared, half-stunned, towards Prometheus. Jettmar thus gives a faithful depiction of the original account of the myth, without really emphasising the symbol within Prometheus, although this scene was most probably inspired by Goethe's Fragment. Such a contrast between Die Befreiung des Prometheus and Prometheus bringt den Menschen das Feuer probably casts light on two important elements, the first being the fact that Jettmar, teaching in the Academy of Fine Arts without creating any work for five years, might have returned to a more classical representation of Greek mythology, and the second that it was drawn in 1916, at a time when the tangible reality of the war had overtaken the Symbolist ideals and conceptions. However, if we go back a few decades, and leave the continent in order to return to England, we shall see that Prometheus, under a perhaps unexpected mask, was still stimulating the imagination and creativity of many English artists.

3. *The Cross-fertilisation of the Prometheus Myth by the Pygmalion Myth*

In the second main chapter of this thesis, when examining the work of Honoré de Balzac in relation to the Prometheus myth, I put forward the idea that, in the mind of the writer, the myth of the Titan was closely associated with the Pygmalion myth. However, such a parallel was even more striking on the other side of the channel.

Whereas in the French novelist's work, it seems that Prometheus and Pygmalion are almost exchangeable when mentioned, it appears that, in England, Prometheus, in spite of being so famous and popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was literally substituted for Pygmalion.[443] Indeed, Prometheus almost entirely disappeared from English artistic works, whereas Pygmalion suddenly became a favourite of British artists.[444] This substitution is not fortuitous, inasmuch as Pygmalion, by the second half of the nineteenth century, became a double of Prometheus, as we shall attempt to show. Before considering the importance the Pygmalion myth took in Victorian society, we shall briefly examine the grounds on which the cross-fertilisation of Prometheus and Pygmalion occurred: when did the "contamination" of the two myths start, on which elements of the myths did it take root, and how did its nature evolve?

a. The process of the cross-fertilisation

Before examining the process of the contamination itself, one has to remember that the Pygmalion myth dates from later than the Prometheus myth, and finds its origin in an account by Ovid, who related the story of a Cypriot sculptor, Pygmalion, who despised women and their company. However, he sculpted a lifelike woman in ivory so perfect that he fell in love with it, to the point that he offered the statue presents, dressed it up, and eventually took it to bed. He prayed to Venus for his creature to

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[443] Following Byron's ode and Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, there were very few treatments of the Prometheus subject. However, I must note that George Augustus Simcox, in 1867, attempted to write the third part of Æschylus' trilogy, and that Planché wrote a parody of the relationship existing between Pandora and Prometheus, entitled Olympic revels (1831). If we now consider the second part of the nineteenth century, apart from the original paintings by Briton Riviere and G.F. Watts mentioned earlier, the most important work on the subject was certainly Prometheus the Firegiver, by Robert Bridges, George Bell and Sons, London, 1884, in which Bridges portrays Prometheus as a noble rebel overthrowing the tyrannical Zeus.

[444] Cf Pygmalion and Galatea: the History of a Narrative in English Literature, by Joshua Assaka, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2001, and Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth, by Gail Marshall, Cambridge University Press, 1998

come to life, and his wish was granted: a kiss from him made her human. A priori, such an account seems to be rather far from the original Prometheus myth.

We could assume that the confusion between Pygmalion and Prometheus has its roots in the fact that both characters were often represented as sculptors. However, the ground of the contamination of the Prometheus myth appears to be subtler, if we consider its historical context: it seems to structure itself around several elements. The representation of Prometheus as a sculptor – as used by Balzac – is actually almost incidental, in the course of the evolution of the myth. As late as Plato's Protagoras, Prometheus forms men from clay, which allowed the "plasticator" side of his persona to develop. The origins of the protean aspect of Prometheus certainly derive from the fact that his story is above all a creation myth, at the scale of mankind, which explains why the figure of the sculptor is just an avatar of the figure of Prometheus within its evolution. However, the cross-fertilisation of the Prometheus myth by the Pygmalion myth certainly occurred, and we have to examine the circumstances which brought it about. As mentioned above, Prometheus, at an early stage, was represented as a sculptor. Nonetheless, it is essentially from the fourth century of our era that this aspect took on a considerable significance. At that time, it was important to transpose the metaphorical level of the sculptor's image (as Creator), to a literal level. It was essential to the Church Fathers, working within a euhemeristic perspective. According to this theory, Prometheus was neither a god nor a Titan, but a skilled sculptor elevated by mankind to the rank of a divinity. This image was easier to handle than that of Prometheus as a prefiguration of Jesus Christ. Indeed, this latter aspect made its first appearance at the same stage, but the figure of the Titan as a rebel was a dangerous one to transpose into a Christian context. The image of Prometheus as a

sculptor, on the contrary, met all the criteria of a euhemeristic transposition, and it was accordingly widely developed at this time.

Euhemerism had another important impact on the Prometheus myth, inasmuch as it vigorously insisted on the character of Pandora, which was soon to be confused with that of Galatea. Indeed, Pandora has always been associated with her Christian counterpart, Eve, with the difference that her ignorance and clumsiness results in the loss of the golden age. She became one of the favourite characters of euhemerism, and the main source of the contamination of the Prometheus myth by the Pygmalion myth probably derives from the growing importance of Pandora. Indeed, in the most ancient myths, she was sent by Jupiter to punish men for Prometheus' crime: originally, she was not Prometheus' creature. However, given the identification of the titan with a sculptor modelling mankind, it did not take long for Pandora to appear in myths as the creation of Prometheus himself, and therefore to be identified with Galatea. As Raymond Trousson put it, in many accounts, one of the most important being Eccos de la Musa Trasmontana o Prometheo. Fabula Alegorica, an anonymous Spanish poem of the seventeenth century, she is formed from clay, like other men.[445] From the same century, the theme of the love of the Creator for his creature started to develop. Such a topic was actually absent from Renaissance conceptions, and thus gave the Prometheus myth a new orientation. La Estatua de Prometeo, by Calderon (probably written in 1669 and published in 1677), was an essential element in this evolution. In actual fact, the significance and Symbolism of the play is rather complex, and it is not our purpose to analyse it here. However, we can notice interesting elements in this work: firstly, the fact that Prometheus is represented as a sculptor modelling a statue of goddess

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[445] In T.P.L.E., pp.210-212

Minerva; secondly, the fact that the goddess helps Prometheus to steal a sun beam, thanks to which the statue comes to life. The parallels between Pygmalion and Prometheus on the one hand and between Minerva and Venus on the other are obviously striking, and the symbol of fire in the process of the animation of matter is crucial in the contamination of the two myths.

However, the value of the animation of matter in each myth takes on, once again, a different significance. The fact that Minerva replaces Venus is certainly not a fortuitous element in the Prometheus myth. Indeed, the appearance of this goddess in the myth is not exclusive to Calderon's work. Houdar de la Motte's Prométhée (1753), and Aumale de Corsenville's Pandore (1789)– in which Prometheus marries Pandora with Minerva's agreement – amongst numerous other works of the same period, make use of the same theme. Such an inspiration derives from Boccaccio's Decameron, Boccaccio himself being inspired by Servius and Fulgence. In chapter XLIV of the fourth book, in a chapter entitled "De Prometheo Japeti Filio, qui fecit Pandoram et genuit Ydidem et Deucalionem",[446] Minerva, admiring the statue Prometheus has just modelled, asks him to follow her to Olympus, where he could find a useful present for his creature. Prometheus agrees and, observing that everything in Heaven is animated by fire, steals a sparkle from the Sun wheel in order to give it to mankind. As early as Boccaccio's work, Prometheus appears as the spiritual creator of mankind, as "plasmator animi". He gives man a conscience, and intelligence. It is through this gift, symbolised by fire, that he becomes the benefactor of men. In this respect, it is interesting to consider that Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, supports Prometheus when he steals fire from the gods, a rebellion against the power of her own father.

[446] "On Japet's Son Prometheus, who Made Mandora, and engendered Ydid and Deucalion"

Using the figure of the goddess in such a way means that Wisdom is therefore recruited to the rebel's side. Prometheus' love for men is represented as righteous, pure, wise and disinterested. Here, we have to remember that in Goethe's 1773 Prometheus, Minerva was identified by critics,[447] and possibly rightly so, with Prometheus himself. On a symbolic level, Minerva stands for wisdom, which is one of the main attributes of Prometheus the fore-thinker. This would explain why Prometheus and Minerva could be seen as one soul.

In the Pygmalion myth, though the gift of life is also symbolised by the same element, fire, the animation of matter which follows is of a different nature, and this is certainly why the intervention of Venus is required. Indeed, she is the divinity of love and beauty, and not of altruistic love. We could therefore assume that, if she is central in the Pygmalion myth, it is because the sculptor's love is somehow selfish, and also because, without her intervention, which is motivated by a form of vanity, the statue would never come to life. On the contrary, in the Prometheus myth, Minerva's intercession takes the form of an assent. Pygmalion wants his statue to come to life for his own happiness, and we have to bear in mind that his creation is to a large extent a reflection of himself. In this respect, in spite of the numerous similarities between the structure of the Pygmalion myth and that of the Prometheus myth, the sculptor himself is very close to the figure of Narcissus. The consequence of this is that the metaphor of fire in this myth does not have the same value as in the Prometheus myth. An

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[447] We are thinking here of Karl Kérényi, in Prometheus, p.16, and of H. Düntzer, Goethes Prometheus und Pandora, 1874, p.37. The passage that Raymond Trousson quotes to concur with Düntzer's comment on the relationship between Prometheus and Minerva ("Minerva and Prometheus appears as the mirror of the artist's soul") is the following:
Und du bist meinem Geist,
Was er sich selbst ist.

animation of matter is also at stake here, but in relation to the theme of love. In actual fact, the metaphor of fire understood as the flame of passion is part of the amorous casuistry in the myth of Pygmalion, as opposed to the Promethean flame, where what is at stake is the flame of knowledge, technology, and progress. Therefore, even if, on a literal level, the myth of Prometheus and the Pygmalion myth intertwine, they actually require a different type of interpretation.

However, a new development, determined by the protean aspect of myths, occurred during the nineteenth century. Indeed, the metaphor of fire as a fire of creation-making led to Prometheus becoming the type of the (rebellious) artist amongst Romantic artists, as analysed earlier. Nonetheless, even if the Prometheus myth, for the past centuries, had frequently been cross-fertilized by the Pygmalion myth, both of them had preserved their separate identities. They never entirely merged, and, as a matter of fact, in the nineteenth century, both had an equal success. The reason for the extreme popularity of the two myths was probably very similar for both, since, once again, they were to be somehow contaminated by one another. An examination of the social context will help us to find the cause of this intertwining. Indeed, as Robert Upstone notes, "The Pygmalion myth [...]touched male fears about women and their changing social status through access to education and the world outside the home".[448] Robert Upstone explains that the Pygmalion account was reassuring for men, inasmuch as Pygmalion is the creator as well as owner of his ideal spouse, which allows him to conclude that such a story "mirrors the dynamics of Victorian marital relations, or stereotyped male expectations of how they should be. Pygmalion was a reflection of

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[448] In *The Artist's Studio*, by Robert Upstone, Exposed: The Victorian Nude, ed. by Alison Smith, Tate Publishing, London, 2001, pp.186-187

himself, and also an act of sexless creation not requiring sex, linking further to male fear of women".[449] Gail Marshall, who interestingly argues that both the professional and personal history of Victorian actresses were defined by the Pygmalion and Galatea myth, and by the way in which they negotiated with the sculptural metaphor, stresses that "there is little disctinction in any of the nineteenth-century Pygmalion poems between the 'statue' as animate and as inanimate female object, and crucially, coming to life offers no access to a language with which to express a dissenting sensitivity."[450] Indeed, a very specific historical and sociological context could explain the "revival" of the Pygmalion myth. The Prometheus myth certainly aroused a similar interest during the same period, but in this case, the interest was structured around the rebellious aspect of the Titan. It is not on this level of interpretation that we have to look for a clarification of the link between the two myths at this time. Nevertheless, if we take into account the nature of the works on Pygmalion which introduce elements of the Prometheus story at this stage, we could find the key to the intertwining of the two myths. Indeed, this intermingling essentially occurred in the 1880's, and the main work which should be examined in order to define the circumstances under which it took place is the twelve-volume verse cycle by the sculptor Thomas Woolner, entitled Pygmalion (1881).[451]

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[449] *Ibid.*
[450] In Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth, by Gail Marshall, Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1998, p.22
[451] Pygmalion, by Thomas Woolner, Macmillan and co., London, 1881

a. The Construction of the Double: Thomas Woolner

An interest in the figure of Pygmalion, coming from Thomas Woolner, is not surprising, inasmuch as this artist, who was part of the small group of Pre-Raphaelites,[452] was also the only sculptor among the famous brotherhood. In this respect, the first obvious double to take into account is the identification at stake between Pygmalion, and his dreamt model. The sculptor manages to reach the climax of his art by giving life to his own creation. However, it is not on that "double" in particular that we are going to concentrate, but on the fact that a strong and continuous link is established between Prometheus and Pygmalion in Woolner's eponymous cycle.

As early as the second chapter of Pygmalion, entitled "Pygmalion's work", Woolner mentions Prometheus as one of the main subjects to be executed by the sculptor, along with Venus, Dionysus and Zeus. In the description of the panel Pygmalion intends to realise on the Titan, Woolner actually devotes 94 verses to Prometheus himself, but it is also worth noticing that he is as recurrent figure in the rest of the chapter, where he appears as a link between the various mythological figures, as well as in the entire cycle. One of the most interesting aspects of the way in which Woolner deals with the figure of Prometheus is that he seems to be looking for exhaustiveness in his account of the Titan's acts, and qualities. From the very beginning of the passage devoted to Prometheus, Woolner evokes the double nature of Prometheus, both godlike and human:

Prometheus lived not wholly God nor man,[453]

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[452] Along with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and others. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded in 1848

[453] In Pygmalion, by Thomas Woolner, Macmillan and co., London, 1881, p.24

He then mentions, probably thanks to a remembrance of Goethe, the close association existing between himself and Athena. This is particularly fruitful, since the cross-fertilisation between the Prometheus myth and the Pygmalion myth often stems from the likeness existing between the couples Pygmalion/ Venus, and Prometheus/Athena. It is indeed thanks to the nature of such a close relationship that creatures are brought to life: literally speaking with Pygmalion's creation (here called Hebe, and not Galatea), and figuratively with men, who are awoken to civilisation. However, it is only with the help of Venus that Pygmalion's wish is fulfilled, and it is only with the help of Athena that Prometheus can bring fire to mankind:

Not love of man, but from deep love

Of him Prometheus she her promise gave

Of counsel: promised he should snatch the fire

From torch of Eros, thunderbolt of Zeus,

Or from the car of Helios seize a spark[454].

This example allows us to consider the way in which Woolner, in terms of mythology, attempts to encompass all the existing variations given of the Prometheus myth in his work, by enumerating the many possible sources from which Prometheus might have stolen fire in order to give it to mankind.

Another important feature attributed to Prometheus in Pygmalion is the fact that he does not properly appear as a rebel against Zeus, and least of all, as a trickster, two elements that we might have expected, given that Woolner undertook to synthesise the numerous "strata" of the myth. Indeed, in the following passage, devoted to Zeus, Woolner mentions the fact that Prometheus helped Zeus fight against the Titans,

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[454] *Ibid.*, p. 27

because, as a fore thinker, he has "seen the Giants' doom/ And hoped by serving the Olympian Gods/ To claim for wage a spark of Heaven's fire".[455] In actual fact, Woolner, in his poem, strongly emphasises the idea that Prometheus, above all, is the benefactor of mankind, as well as the sacrifice he makes for them. It is actually said of Prometheus that:

But for his pigmies, who fast multiplied,

And waxed in force with every watched-for chance;

He was invincibly resolved to win

The vital spark by which alone they might

Be lifted from the brutes[456]

It is actually almost reluctantly, and only inspired by his love for mankind, that Prometheus commits the crime for which he will be severely punished. In this respect, it is particularly interesting to notice that Woolner "shaded off" the rebellious and conqueror aspect of Prometheus, a feature which, as mentioned earlier, was one of the main elements of divergence between the Prometheus and the Pygmalion myths. We shall come back later to that point, as it is not accidental.

Moreover, whereas Woolner tried to cover or give an account of all the variations on the Prometheus myth, one of the major aspects of the myth and of Prometheus' person itself is missing. I am here referring to Prometheus Plasticator, Prometheus giving shape and life to mankind, who is not evoked until the very end of the poem. One could therefore assume that Woolner omitted that side of Prometheus precisely to avoid any confusion or any contamination between Pygmalion and Prometheus.

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[455] *Ibid.*, p.31
[456] *Ibid.*, pp.31-32

However, even before examining the ending of the poem, we have to reject such a hypothesis and examine more closely the lexical field and metaphors of fire and creation-making within the poem, inasmuch as it elaborates a tight network between Prometheus and Pygmalion, which already casts a light on Woolner's "omission".

From the fourth book, a clear parallel is established between the sculptor and Prometheus:

Longed not Prometheus for the fire of heaven

Wherewith to solace miserable man,

More vehemently than sought Pygmalion

The spark to flash his Hebe into life[457]

The "spark" here attributed to Pygmalion is very fruitful since this word is a recurrent one in the extracts on Prometheus quoted above. Their common quest to bring their "beloved" to life, metaphorically or not, is thus clearly established in this parallel. In the same book, and perhaps even more importantly, after Pygmalion's prayer to Venus to give life to his statue, such is the answer that is made to him:

[...] Men cannot,

In earthly state handle pure truth and fire,

The means of Gods, and still remain unscorched.

But you are strong; the prize shines bright in view,

Cost what it may a pathway must be cleared.

And if you forward press unfalteringly,

Pallas Athena may beside you march[458].

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[457] *Ibid.*, p.52
[458] *Ibid.*, p.72

We can notice here, again, that although not named as such, Prometheus is clearly evoked: through the themes of the theft of fire, the punishment, and, most of all, his special relationship with Pallas Athena. In this respect, the mention of the goddess in that verse could be interpreted in two ways, since Pygmalion's prayer is addressed to Venus, and not to Athena. Either we only have to understand, here, that the relationship uniting Prometheus and Athena is a model to be followed by Pygmalion and Venus, or we can perceive a subtle superimposition of the Pygmalion on the Prometheus myths based on the blurring of the identity of the Goddess.

The likening between Prometheus and Pygmalion goes even further on the seventh book, when Pygmalion, reflecting on his art, wonders why, in Ancient Greece, the art of generations of sculptors remained similar, because of the process of imitation, as well as "lifeless":

Till Daedalus with new Promethean fire,

Carving the stubborn blocks of wood and stone

To limbs detached, gave to his images

The air of will and motion! Rude, uncouth

They were. But they had life, the breath of Gods![459]

This passage is particularly fascinating, inasmuch as the adjective "Promethean", for the first time in Pygmalion, evolves naturally to become applied to the sculptural field. What Daedalus managed to do symbolically, that is to give "life", "the breath of Gods", to his statues, thanks to the Promethean fire, is now recalled by Woolner in anticipation of what Pygmalion will achieve with the help of Venus. The network of correspondences and associations between Pygmalion and Prometheus in Woolner's

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[459] *Ibid.*, p.105

cycle is getting tighter and tighter. However, the establishment of such links is made even clearer in the conclusion of Book XI (at the end of which the miracle has just been accomplished), where the figure of Prometheus, again, is conjured up by Woolner, who seems to invite us to a reading a posteriori of Pygmalion, in the light of the now unveiled parallel established between the sculptor and the Titan.

The minstrels unto gaping crowds forth poured

In floods Pygmalion's almighty deeds,

The doing which had taken ten long lives;

Achilles not more brave, Alcides strong;

And a moot question if Prometheus self,

Or even Hephaestus could have wrought a form

That breathed a sweeter life than Hebe's smile.[460]

That conclusive and crucial passage is the only one in Pygmalion to allude to Prometheus as "Prometheus Plasticator". Given that Woolner had devoted a long part of his fourth book to Prometheus, being very careful and minute in the restitution of the various versions of the myth, we cannot but put forward the idea that Woolner ingeniously structures Pygmalion in order to progressively build an association, and even a superimposition between Prometheus and Pygmalion. First, thanks to subtle intertwining metaphors and images, later to the superimposition of the couples formed by Pygmalion and Venus on the one hand, and Prometheus and Athena on the other, and eventually by identifying them. Woolner's cycle is particularly interesting inasmuch as the association he makes between Pygmalion and Prometheus is very consciously established, and is not simply the result of the long evolution of myths.

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[460] *Ibid.*, p.173

Woolner clearly states here that Pygmalion is one of Prometheus' masks, but the very choice of that mask requires interpretation. It is true that as a sculptor, Woolner was undoubtedly naturally drawn towards that figure. However, his choice is probably deeper, and shared with other artists from his generation, who were not necessarily sculptors. Indeed, as an artist, and for various reasons, the mask of Pygmalion probably appealed more to him than that of Prometheus.

First of all, choosing Pygmalion for an artist possibly meant rejecting the rebellious side of the Titan. Indeed, we mentioned that Woolner shaded off that aspect of the Titan. Although Prometheus' love of mankind and creation-making powers had everything to seduce the Aesthetes, the violence bound to his rebellion, on the other hand, might not precisely represent their concerns. At the very least, it might have been slightly opposed to their chief focus: the ideal of Beauty. This leads us to the second and most important reason for their interest in Pygmalion. That mask actually allowed them to use the figure to stand for their own selves as artists. Indeed, Pygmalion was entirely human, which favoured the identification with him, but, at the same time, his creation-making power, directed towards Beauty, matched that of Prometheus in its ability to generate life, an ideal which was even more vivid for Symbolist artists. In this connection, their art was striving towards an ideal realm whose existence relied on that possibility. Eventually, the Pygmalion myth became a reflection of the narcissism of the artist, the figure of Narcissus also being very popular in Symbolist art. All of these elements could explain why so many works of art based on Pygmalion flourished in England during the second half of the nineteenth century. The most famous remains

Edward Burne-Jones' Pygmalion Series (Fig. 25 abcd),[461] but we can also cite The Wife of Pygmalion, A Translation from the Greek (Fig.26),[462] by George Frederic Watts, John Tenniel's Pygmalion and the Image,[463] and Ernest Normand's Pygmalion and Galatea.[464]

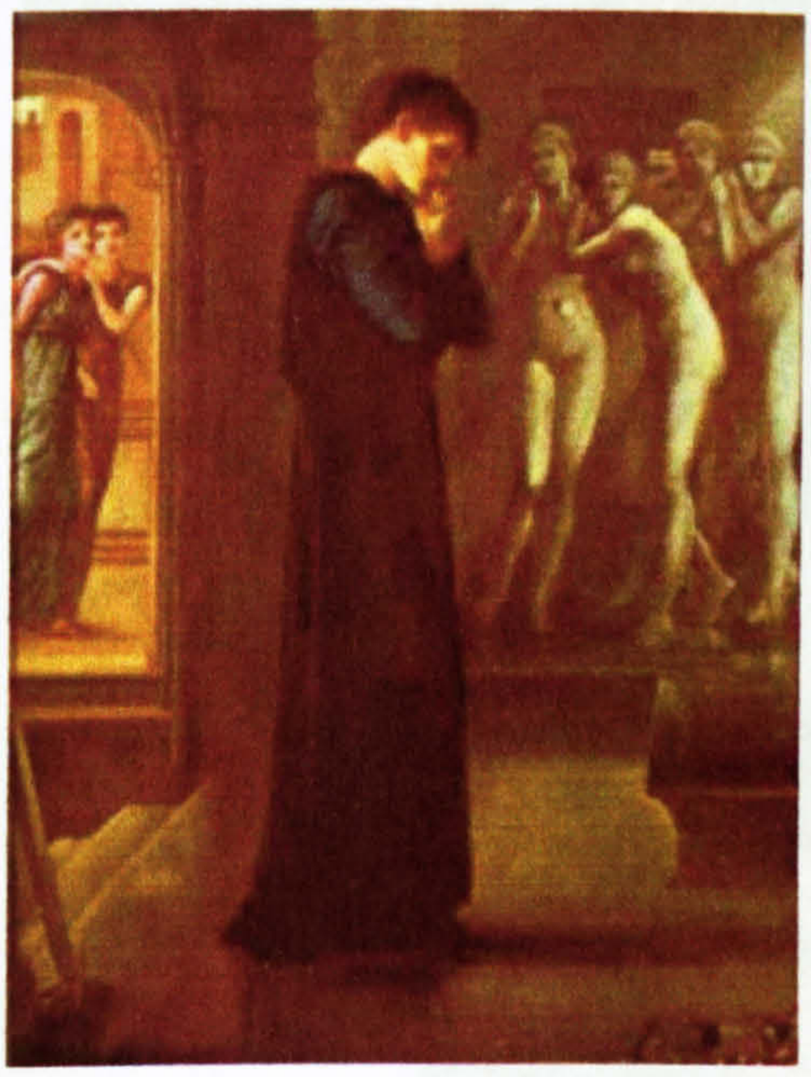

Fig. 25 a

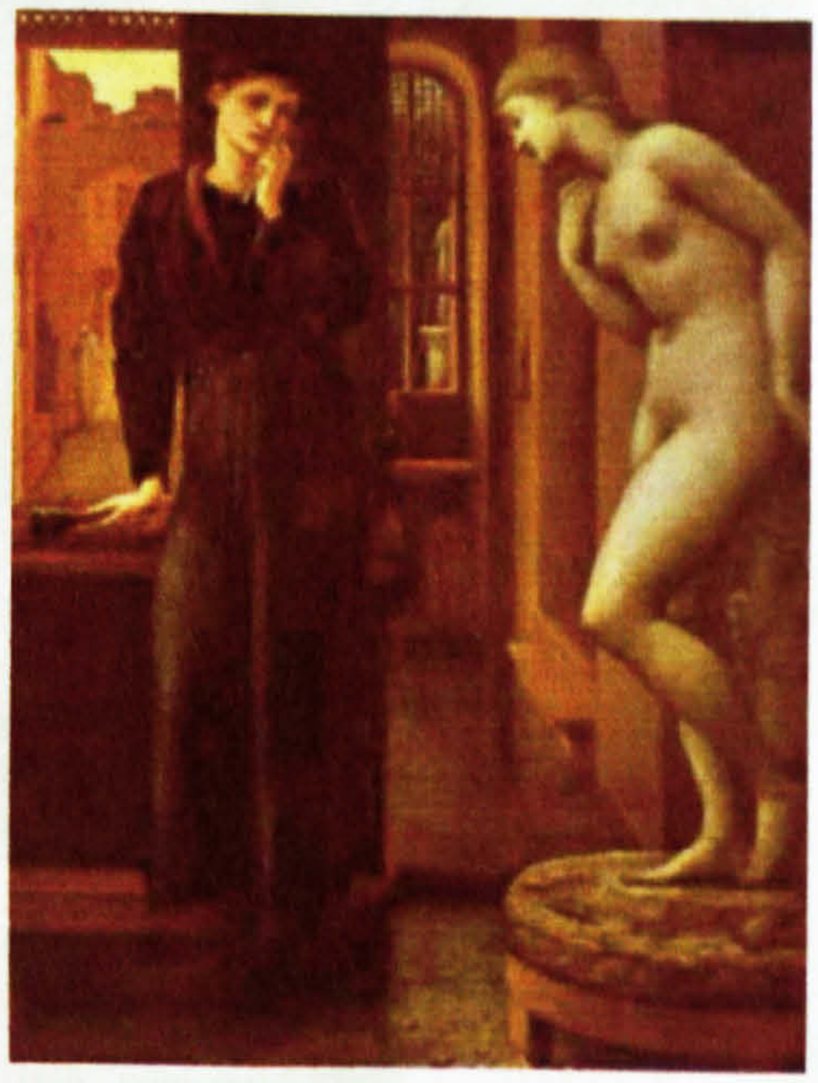

Fig.25 b

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[461] The Pygmalion Series(1868-1870), by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, The Heart Desires (Fig.25 a); The Hand Refrains (Fig.25 b); The Godhead fires (Fig.25 c); The Soul Attains (Fig.25 d), oil on canvas, Joseph Setton Collection, Paris. There is also another set in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

[462] The Wife of Pygmalion, A Translation from the Greek (1868), by George Frederic Watts, oil on canvas, 67.3 × 53.3 cm, The Farringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park, Oxfordshire

[463] Pygmalion and the Image (1878), by John Tenniel, watercolour on paper, 58.4 × 36.5 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

[464] Pygmalion and Galatea (1886), by Ernest Normand, oil on canvas, 152.5 × 121cm, Atkinson Art Gallery, Southport Arts and Cultural Services, Sefton M.B.C.

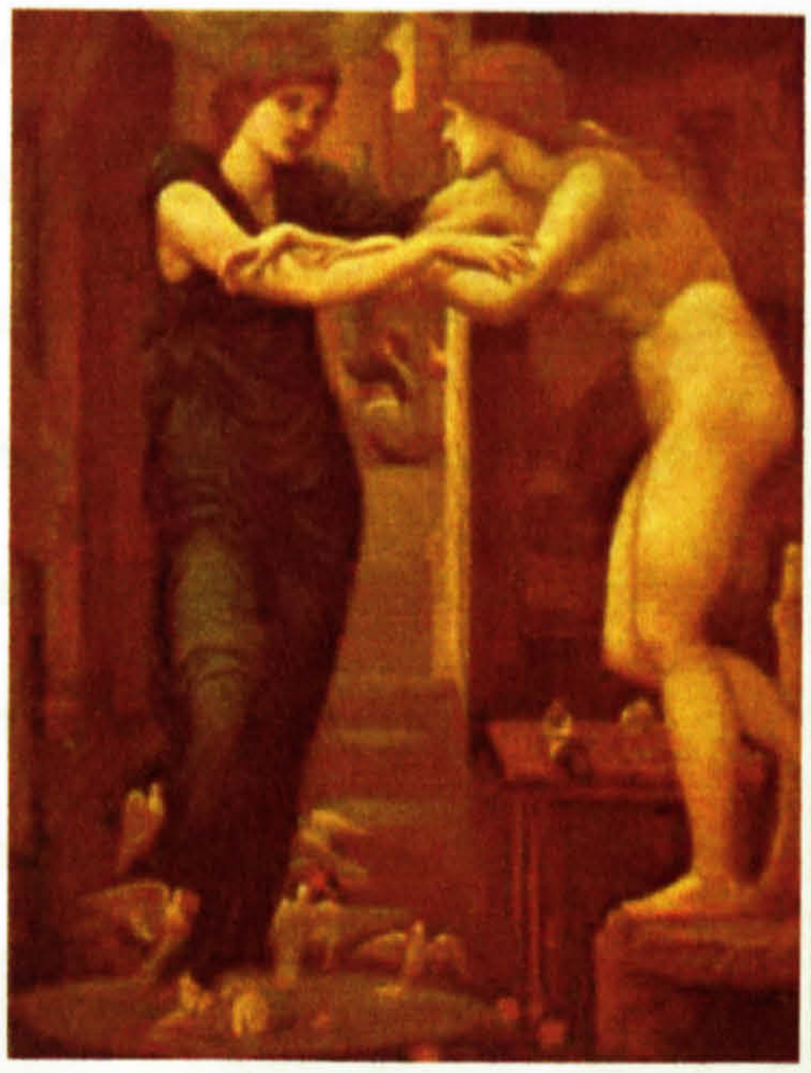

Fig.25 c

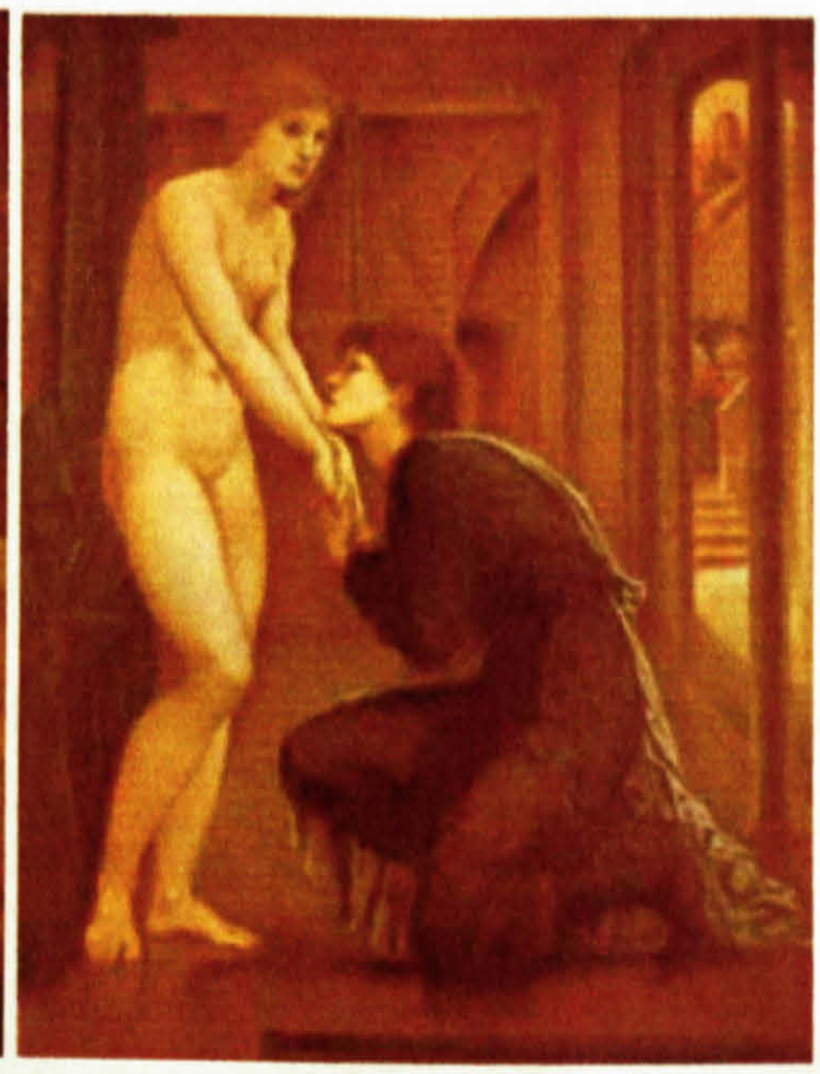

Fig.25 d

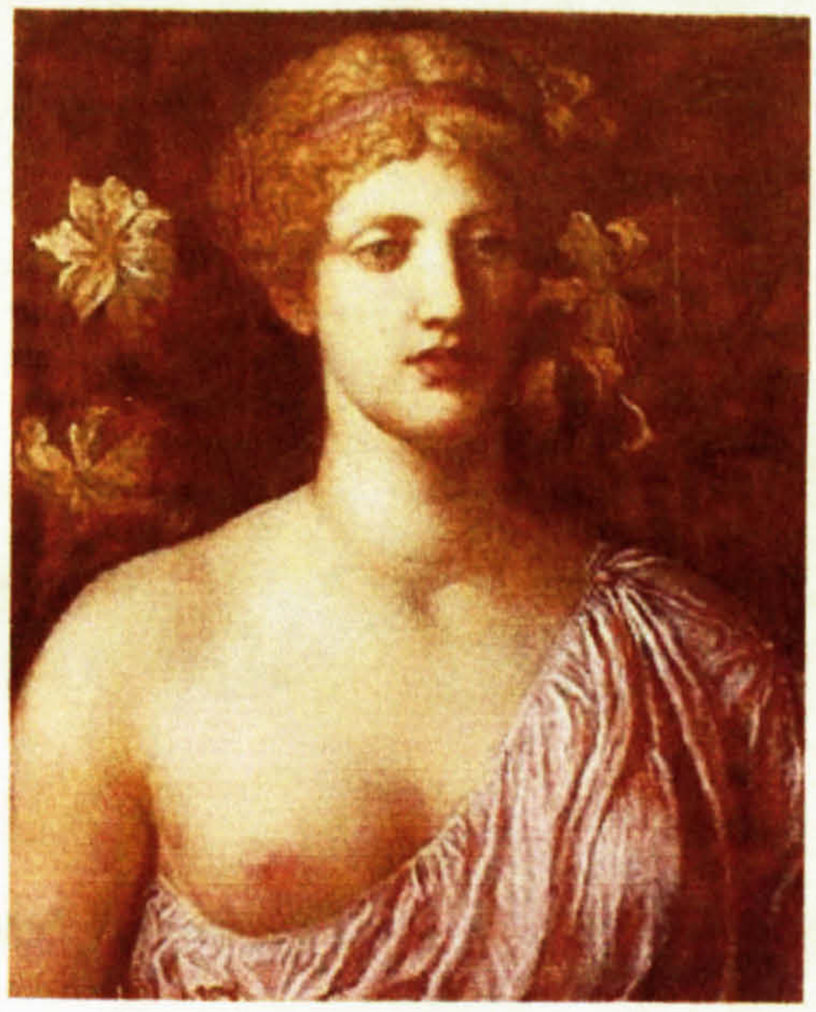

Fig.26

It is probably important to mention here that the figure of Prometheus could also be seen showing through in the works of those artists, or of other artists of this generation, who were inspired by the figure of Pandora. She was, of course, inextricably linked to the myth of Prometheus Plasticator. An interest in her certainly stemmed from a larger fascination for the type of the femme fatale, but we cannot ignore the fact that the

appeal of Pygmalion, of Galatea, and of Pandora at the same historical period, when Prometheus disappeared from English artistic works, made the Titan conspicuous by his absence. This is another element suggesting the superimposition of Pygmalion and Prometheus. Harry Bates's sculpture entitled Pandora (Fig.27)[465] is particularly remarkable in this regard, inasmuch as the mixed media through which she is represented seems to materialise the likeness between the first woman and Galatea, the two creatures being formed from the mineral element.

Fig.27

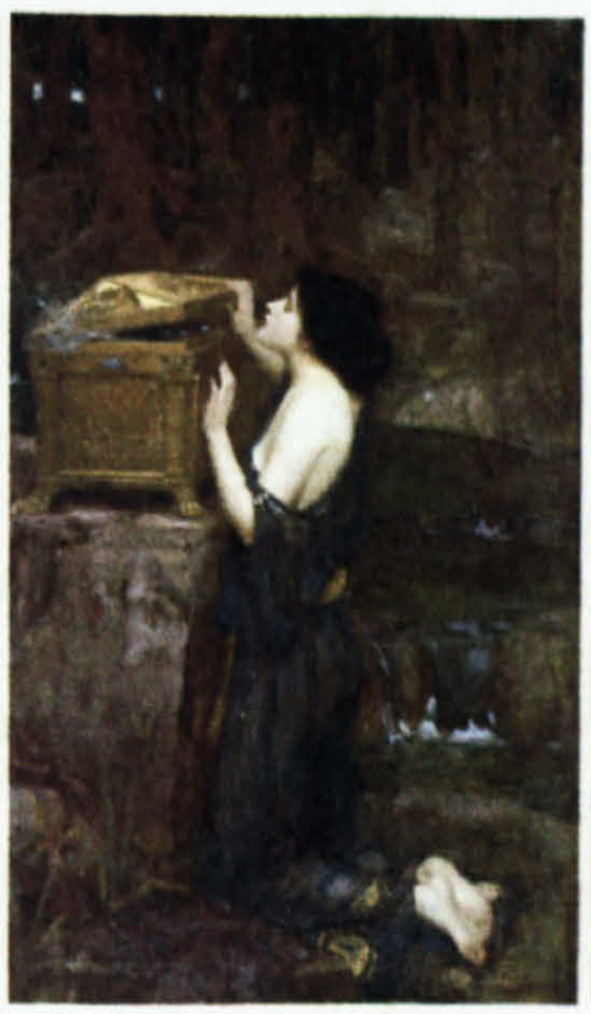

Fig.28

Fig.29

Indeed, Pandora, as sculpted in marble by Harry Bates, appears like Galatea before she comes to life. In a different artistic field, John William Waterhouse's Pandora (Fig.28)[466] and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Pandora (Fig.29)[467] are probably the most famous paintings of that period on the subject. Lawrence Alma Tadema's small

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[465] Pandora (c.1890), by Harry Bates, marble, ivory, bronze and gilt, 94 × 50.8 × 73.7 cm, Tate Britain

[466] Pandora (1896), by John William Waterhouse, oil on canvas, 152 × 91 cm, private collection

[467] Study for Pandora (1869), by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, chalk on paper, Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park, Oxfordshire, UK

diploma picture for the Royal Watercolour Society, which bears the same title,[468] is also worth mentioning, because of its graceful and exquisite quality. It could be said of the construction of such a network of references and of the special focus on Pygmalion, apprehended as a mask of Prometheus, that the artists decided to draw on the pure Symbolism of the Prometheus myth, while fading out its essential dynamic and, to some extent, violent dimension. In the Victorian context, the figure of Prometheus might also have faded out because he represented a strong male figure, at a time when the figure of the *femme fatale*, perceived as castrating, was predominant. The Pygmalion myth, on the contrary, objectified the woman, and in this respect, was most reassuring. We could also put forward the idea that it was a way of using Prometheus as a sheer symbol (paradoxically, by hiding him), and of extracting the myth from the Titan. This leads us to the final Symbolist mask of Prometheus, which is also the accomplishment and fulfilment of the Titan as a symbol.

4. Prometheus and the Total Work of Art

For Symbolist artists, at different levels, the figure of Prometheus was a reflection of their spiritual concerns. He reflected their spiritual crisis as such, which explains the importance of a christianised Prometheus, onto which they could transfer their need for the Absolute. But more broadly, he also reflected their spiritual aspirations: considering any of the Prometheus' masks previously examined, the essence of the fascination for the Titan revolved around his creative power. And this fascination did not revolve exclusively around those features which were inherited from the original

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[468] Pandora (1881), by Lawrence Alama Tadema, Watercolour, 26 × 24.3 cm, Royal Watercolour Society, London

figure of Prometheus Plasticator. I am alluding to a larger symbolic power thanks to which the figure of Prometheus entailed the possibility of a new world order, of a new golden age, through a cosmic regeneration.

For artists, the creative power of the Titan obviously led to the use of Prometheus as a mirror (sometimes distorting, if we think of Pygmalion) which reflected themselves during the process of creation. Within the Symbolist context of Art for Art's sake, we understand that such a *mise en abyme* could not be avoided. However, the use of Prometheus as a symbol went even further at the very end of the nineteenth century, since he became a key figure in the attempt to achieve the great dream of the Total artwork, named the "*gesamtkunstwerk*" by Richard Wagner. The term refers to an ideal form of art which would fully integrate drama, art, poetry, and, most of all, music – whose immateriality is already linked to the sacred – into a spectacle much greater than the sum of the elements that constitute the artwork. It was more than a union, or a gathering of different arts: the magnificent dream of Symbolist artists was that of an organic fusion. According to Wagner, the link uniting all the different arts had been lost, and, in their isolation, they had been corrupted. In this respect, the Aeschylean drama, as (supposedly) played in Ancient Greece was given as a model of such an achievement. This very model was surely a fantasised one, since, even nowadays, there are still many uncertainties about the way in which Æschylus dramas were actually performed. But the dream went further than this idealisation, inasmuch as the *gesamtkunstwerk* concentrated all the aspirations of the Symbolists. Indeed, their conception of the total artwork even exceeded the rather strict definition given by Wagner, for whom the term *gesamtkunstwerk* was mainly applied to the operatic genre. The *gesamtkunstwerk*, because of its totality, actually became inextricably linked in

the Symbolists' mind to the synaesthetic ideal, and to correspondences, through which the Symbolist fore-world could be reached. In this respect, aspirations turned towards the concept of the total work of art, the achievement of which would also be the fulfilment of Symbolism, the accomplishment of the ideal. Considering what the Total work of art meant to Symbolists, we also understand that they were bound to turn towards the figure of Prometheus in order to try and achieve it.

Firstly, because of the reference to the Aeschylean drama: the figure of Prometheus had supposedly allowed Æschylus to conjure up a striking and beguiling artistic expression, so that a reference or homage to the Greek playwright was probably perceived as a way of following in his footsteps. Secondly, and more widely, to Symbolist artists, the *gesamtkunstwerk* relied on a mysterious and sacred creative alchemy, very close indeed to a cosmogony, which Prometheus, as a symbol, embodied.

For the last "generation" of Symbolism that we are now going to examine, the concepts of synaesthesias and correspondences took a different significance than for the first Symbolists. It became more than an ideal in the sense that various scientific theories from the very end of the nineteenth century gave, as we could put it, positivist grounds to what were then considered by the majority of people to be Symbolist dreams. The apparition of such theories dramatically changed the inflection of the interpretation of the figure of Prometheus, as we shall see. Amongst them, those deriving from Thomas Young's theory of light were the most important. As opposed to Isaac Newton's theory that light was a stream of particles, Young proposed that light was in fact a wave motion, and that the colour was determined by its wavelength. Moreover, since he believed that wave motions had to be supported in a material medium, the existence of

an "æther" filling the entire universe had to be presumed. Young's discovery had incredible repercussions on the theory of synaesthesia and its artistic use. Indeed, at the end of the century, scientists put forward the theory that the vibrations of sound and light were very similar, which resulted in the idea that the seven colours of the spectrum and the seven notes of the European scale were in fact two different aspects of the same vibration field. This led Alexander Wallace Rimington "to deal with colour in a new way, and to place its production under as easy and complete control as the production of sound in music",[469] by creating and patenting his famous Colour Organ in 1893. Synaesthesias, and what they could lead to for Symbolists, thus found a rational explanation and application. We shall see how they were used in late Symbolist attempts to create total artworks.

Another essential new element introduced with Symbolism at the dawn of the twentieth century was theosophy, and notably the doctrine formulated by Helena Blavatsky. To a certain extent, it pushed the Symbolist credo to the extreme, and encompassed the new perception of the cosmos as a gigantic field of unknown and mysterious vibrations with unlimited possibilities. Theosophy distinguished the ephemeral from the imperishable in man, and relied on the idea that man had a permanent and essential transpersonal conscience, involved in a slow spiritual awakening. A very important theosophical idea was that matter and spirit were not antagonistic, but part of the same superior unity, and the aim of the always evolving human conscience was to eventually reunite with the absolute source. As we shall now

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[469] In Colour Music, the Art of Light, by A.B. Klein, Lockwood, London, 1930, p.258

see through the work of Frantisek Kupka and that of Alexander Scriabin,[470] they were very much influenced by those new ideas, and Prometheus, as the awakener of conscience, remained a central figure for the late Symbolists, and was even strengthened as such.

a. Totality, Vibration Field, and Prometheus (Frantisek Kupka)

Frantisek Kupka had a very original personal philosophy, as we might define it, and he brought this originality to his various interpretations of Prometheus. But what we call originality, some would call contradiction. Indeed, his personality had a very strong spiritual side, which culminated in his interest in occultism,[471] but at the same time, he claimed to be a rationalist, and put forward scientific explanations for all the phenomena he experienced, however esoteric they may have been. Such a tendency was probably no stranger to the fact that he was strongly influenced by theosophy, which in theory was a fusion between science, religion and philosophy. It is particularly clear in his book entitled La Création dans les arts plastiques,[472] in which he never names theosophy as such, but claims that "the artist is the conductor of the specific state of the nervous system which entails or establishes the telepathic communications and [...] taps the wave of an idea which is – as we say – 'in the air'."[473] This sounds very much like the application of the principles of theosophy to

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[470] It could be objected here that none of these artists should find their place in a thesis limited to Symbolism in Europe, Frantisek Kupka being from Czechoslovakia, and Alexander Scriabin from Russia. However, both artists were paradoxically among the best representatives of late symbolism in Europe. Kupka studied in Vienna, and immigrated to France at the age of 24 to stay there until his death, while Scriabin benefited from the main European symbolist influences by touring extensively on a very frequent basis. This is why the decision was taken to integrate them within the present thesis.

[471] Frantisek Kupka, before his arrival in France, was a medium.

[472] La Création dans les arts plastiques, by Frantisek Kupka, Cercle d'art, Paris, 1989

[473] *Ibid.*, p.209

the artistic field. Kupka started writing La Création dans les arts plastiques from 1910, and only published it in Czechoslovakia in 1923, at a time when he wanted to fully abandon his mysticism in favour of materialism. In this respect, his book is the perfect reflection of this transitional period. An even better reflection of the changes he went through is his treatment of Prometheus, which intervened during that crucial period in his life, from an aesthetic and philosophical point of view.

His first treatment of Prometheus was not the result of a spontaneous choice, since it was commissioned, but he felt a strong affinity with his subject, and very soon used it "for his own art" to achieve personal artistic goals. From 1905 to 1909, Kupka, like his friend and compatriot, Alphonse Mucha, made a living out of various illustrations. This is how the editor Auguste Blaizot came to commission illustrations from Frantisek Kupka for a luxury edition of Æschylus' Prometheus Bound. Kupka was not entirely free to treat the Prometheus subject as he wanted, inasmuch as his illustrations had to be faithful to the general spirit of the play, and accurate in the matching of its different scenes. Kupka therefore opted for an archaic style deprived of perspective and highly decorative. Such a style actually recalled in many respects the art of ancient Egypt. However, the biggest influence that could be felt in Kupka's 18 etchings and aquatints in black and orange was without any doubt that of the Viennese secessionist movement, with its flat treatment of space, extreme stylization, decorative patterns, and its interest in frescoes.[474] Such an influence is not surprising inasmuch as Kupka lived and studied in Vienna between 1892 and 1894, but it is intriguing in the sense that, when he arrived in Paris in 1896, he had decided to keep his distance from mysticism and from the inclination for metaphysics that he had inherited from the

[474] Gustav Klimt, in this respect, is the most obvious reference.

Viennese culture, and which he associated with Symbolism. By doing so, he actually wanted to apply French pictorial theories to his own art,[475] and to favour the depiction of nudes, or scenes of nature. Immigrating to Paris, for him, also meant adopting a French style. Margit Rowell, examining the role of Prometheus in Kupka's art and discussing how he was influenced by the Viennese secession, put forward the fascinating idea that "this reaffirmation of the value of those pictorial beginnings, in the context of his personal activity, was going to free him in return from his obsession with the contemporary French avant-gardes (fauvism, cubism), with their formal theories and with their practices".[476] Thus, the treatment of the Prometheus subject would have allowed Kupka to free himself both from the Viennese aesthetic – by reaching a climax in this mode of expression – and from the French dictates, by retaining only the quintessential from those two sources of inspiration. In other words, his works on Prometheus allowed him to find his own style, an emancipation which led him to abstraction from 1912. This is why Margit Rowell goes on say that "eventually, the quick evolution towards abstraction which was going to follow would make the synthesis of both: it would transpose his observation of the forces of nature onto the canvas (understood, in the French sense, as structure, colour, movement) in bi-dimensional images radically flat, while still expressing a cosmic and symbolic vision".[477] In order to have a clear vision of what the Prometheus treatment brought to

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[475] His works anterior to 1905 are notably influenced by impressionism.
[476] In *Le Prométhée de Kupka*, by Margit Rowell ,Frantisek Kupka 1871-1957 ou l'invention d'une abstraction, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, Paris Musées, 1990, p.25. My translation.
[477] *Ibid.*

his work, we have to examine the personal, chosen vision of Prometheus that he painted with his Prométhée bleu et rouge (Fig.30).[478]

Fig.30

Dating from 1909-1910, Prométhée bleu et rouge demonstrates a very personal style, and the depiction of nature around the figure of Prometheus clearly points out a peculiar conception of the cosmos. It is particularly fruitful to examine a preliminary sketch from the Meda Mladek collection[479] in order to consider the way his conception of the landscape evolved. Indeed, in this study, as Marcella Lista put it, "a sort of luminous aura surrounds the titan in concentric waves, in the manner of the 'thought forms' of occultist iconography".[480] Marcella Lista refers here to the occultist idea that thoughts are real things, even though they are difficult to identify, given that we cannot

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[478] Prométhée bleu et rouge (1909-1910), by Frantisek Kupka, watercolour on paper, 32.1× 29.3 cm, Narodni Gallery, Prague

[479] Study for Prométhée bleu et rouge (1908-1909), by Frantisek Kupka, pastel on paper, Meda Mladek Collection, Prague

[480] In *Le rêve de Prométhée: art total et environnements synesthésiques aux origines de l'abstraction*, by Marcella Lista, Aux origines de l'abstraction, 1800-1914, , édition de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 2003, p.217. My translation. This article was published not long before the present thesis was submitted, and similar conclusions are shared on the value of Prometheus for late Symbolism.

perceive the actual image of the thought, but the image of the effect caused by its accompanying vibrations in the ætherical matter. Frantisek Kupka's choice of such patterns around Prometheus would therefore be revealing of the remaining influence of occultism and mysticism in his art. However, in the final version of Promćthće bleu et rouge, the figuration of vibrations is enlarged to the landscape and is altogether different, appearing as a reflection of his interest in materialism and the synaesthetic application of Thomas Young's theories to art. Indeed, vertical yellow and blue waving lines seem to irradiate from the landscape and the earth. Such graphic patterns undoubtedly represent the cosmos rhythms, and can already be found in the illustrations of Prometheus Bound, notably in that of the Oceanids' song. Kupka's Prometheus, in the middle of the painting, has a physical appearance very close to Jean Delville's Prométhée. Indeed, Kupka's Prometheus is also extremely muscular, and does not show any sign of martyrdom. On the other hand, he holds firmly a gigantic flower still rooted in the ground, and, with his conquering look, his left hand on his hip, the Titan looks as if he has a symbiotic relationship with nature, and at the same time, as if he is its master. It is not surprising if we consider the fact that Kupka, put forward the idea that "the example of organic coherence in the surrounding world offers itself, at hand, to any painter, any sculptor. May they create as logically as nature does!".[481] This indication, together with the definition that he gave of the artist in his Création dans les arts plastiques, could let us assume that some sort of identification with Prometheus was at stake here.

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[481] Quoted in *Un Univers nouveau*, by Miroslav Lamač, Frantisek Kupka: 1871-1957 ou l'invention d'une abstraction, , Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, Paris Musées, 1990, p.10

A crucial aspect of Prométhée bleu et rouge resides in the choice of these colours. We shall come back to that point in the following chapter on Alexander Scriabin, but it is essential to mention that in Theosophical circles, which were extremely interested in the colour spectrum understood as vibrations, and which saw in red the colour of sheer matter, and in blue, the other end of the spectrum, that of spirit, or æther. Prometheus would thus appear, after being half human half godlike, as the synthesis between matter and spirit, and thus as the cosmogonic symbol *par excellence*. Another important element, concerning the place of the theory of vibrations in Kupka's art is the fact that, commenting on the gymnastic exercises that he executed naked in his garden in the morning, he mentions that "his entire body [was] penetrated by lights and perfumes", and goes on to say that "I thus live marvelous moments, adorned with nuances being poured from the chromatic keyboard of Titans".[482] Through those words, Kupka sustains a possible identification with Prometheus, and by mentioning the "chromatic keyboard of Titans", underlines the importance of a synaesthetic conception of the cosmos guaranteed by universal cosmic vibrations. As Marcella Lista puts it, commenting on the rather peculiar physical exercises of the painter, Kupka was very much inspired in this respect by the theories of Elisée Reclus, which allows her to say that "the identification of the artist with Prometheus is [...] an answer to the interrogation phrased by Reclus at the end of the chapter "Progress" of The Man and the Earth: "Who will determine limits to the power of man, whereas he will benefit

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[482] In La Création dans les arts plastiques, by Frantisek Kupka, Cercle d'art, Paris, 1989, p.136. My translation

from a perfect harmony with the immense mechanism of nature, and all of his vibrations will be measured by the course of the stars".[483]

The influence of Reclus was going in the same direction as another major source of inspiration for Kupka in his interpretation of Prometheus: that of Lucien Dhuys, who wrote the preface to Blaizot's edition of Prometheus Bound. Dhuys actually made an original interpretation of the Prometheus myth himself, putting forward the idea that Prometheus was the embodiment of a decisive period in Ancient Greece, which could be compared with the turning point between the Old and the New Testament. Dhuys explains that the cruel and unfair reign of the Olympian gods is challenged by Prometheus, who introduces the possibility of a change in the balance of the Universal forces, therefore announcing the final victory of man over destiny. The emphasis Dhuys put on the cosmic power of Prometheus had a great influence on Kupka's own understanding of Prometheus. What is particularly interesting is the fact that Dhuys named his personal philosophy, based on the power of the human spirit, "Orphism", a philosophy which shared many principles with the philosophy that Kupka developed at that time. Indeed, Lucien Dhuys states that "the orphic magus [that] [...]was teaching the evolution of natural forces emerged from the primordial chaos, slowly organised to create, in their last effort, the man in whom their conscience had arisen. In this regard, Orphism was unveiling the power of the spirit first oppressed by matter, and which, through a free return, and exalted by a strange force, was taming the matter which had created it".[484] Such a philosophy is indeed very close to the one developed by Elisée

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[483] In *Le rêve de Prométhée : art total et environnements synesthésiques aux origines de l'abstraction* , by Marcella Lista, Aux origines de l'abstraction, 1800-1914, , édition de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 2003, p.217

[484] Quoted in *Le Prométhée de Kupka*, by Margit Rowell, Frantisek Kupka 1871-1957 ou l'invention d'une abstraction, , Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, Paris Musées, 1990, p.28. My translation.

Reclus's L'Homme et la Terre,[485] in which he famously stated that "Man is Nature becoming aware of itself", and which soon became one of Frantisek Kupka's principles. Even if the conception of Prometheus evolved because of the development of such ideas, it is fascinating to see that, in spite of that, the duo Prometheus – Orpheus, reemerged once again at the very end of the period we are interested in. It is now time to examine another work of art, which was also influenced by similar philosophies, but in which the principle of synaesthesias was concretely applied to a total artwork.

b. Above the *gesamtkunstwerk*: Prometheus, the Poem of Fire

Alexander Scriabin, even though an Eastern European, like Frantisek Kupka, toured and travelled extensively, which led him to become part of many Symbolist circles in Europe, in London, Paris, Switzerland, and above all, in Brussels. This allowed him to collect and make a certain number of Symbolist ideas his own, and even to push them to the extreme. Scriabin was truly a very strange character, whose ego had the dimension of his ambitions, outsoaring boundaries between arts. As a composer, he still remains a marginal figure, inasmuch as he was deeply influenced by his peculiar philosophy, and by other forms of art. As James Baker puts it, "he came increasingly under the influence of diverse aesthetic, philosophical, and mystical doctrines which impelled him toward an artistic vision of unprecedented grandiosity".[486] His great early fascination was with Nietzsche, but, from 1905, his interest moved to different circles. A Symbolist one in Brussels, thanks to which he became intimate with Jean Delville,

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[485] L'Homme et la Terre, by Elisée Reclus, la découverte poche, Paris, 1998
[486] In The Music of Alexander Scriabin, by James H. Baker, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1986, p.vii

who designed the frontispiece (Fig.17) of the Prometheus score, but also, from 1905, the Theosophical circles of Annie Besant and that of Madame Blavatsky,[487] whose influence eventually led him to write mystical poems, entitled Promethean Fantasies.[488] In the light of this title, we can see in which respects this general creative environment is particularly relevant to our discussion. It is also important to mention that Scriabin was fascinated by Wagner's conception of the *gesamtkunstwerk*. However, his own view of what the Total work of art had to achieve was even wider than Wagner's. Indeed, Wagner wanted the *gesamtkunstwerk* to achieve a fusion, a synthesis between all the arts, but did not mention the principle of synaesthesia, which Scriabin considered as crucial. In the same way as Swedenborg, Charles Baudelaire, and Arthur Rimbaud,[489] Scriabin could not conceive of reaching the absolute of the total artwork without relying on correspondences and synaesthesias, the sensitive keys to the Symbolist fore-world.

Prometheus, or the Poem of Fire, was the last work to be completed, but when he died in 1915 aged 43, Scriabin was working on a colossal multimedia composition entitled the Mysterium, through which he was convinced mankind would literally transcendentally unite. In actual fact, Scriabin wanted the Mysterium to incorporate a gigantic orchestra, dancers, a choir, a colour and an olfactory keyboard, poetry, and, last but not least, bells suspended from clouds (namely, from zeppelins). The seven-day long work was meant to take place in an amphitheatre built for the purpose in India, in the foothills of Himalayas, in symbiosis with the elements, the preludes being

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[487] Scriabin never became a member of the Theosophical Society as such, but he took part in several meetings in Switzerland.
[488] One of his most notorious works, The Poem of Ecstasy, actually derived from one of his own "literal" poems.
[489] See his poem entitled "vowels".

sunrises and the codas, sunsets, flames erupting accordingly, and perfumes varying depending on the music. Scriabin conceived his work as some sort of experience mankind had to go through before the ultimate cosmic regeneration.[490] From the description of how he intended his Mysterium to be performed, we can see that he pushed the Symbolist fascination for synaesthesia to its limit. Interestingly enough, when he started composing the Poem of Fire, he actually believed that the work he was working on was the Mysterium in question, but he soon realized that it was too early to achieve his full vision. Nevertheless, we shall see that the concept of the Mysterium left its trace on Prometheus, the Poem of Fire (Op.60). We could assume that, for Scriabin also, the last step, or the threshold leading to the total artwork was the figure of Prometheus, which integrated that of the creator, of the great one who was sacrificed, and of the first (new/super) man. It is probably important to mention that, because the Poem of Fire was composed at the end of his life, it was steeped in Scriabin's system of thoughts. Some, here, would say that the greatness of this work largely relied on his egomania and theosophical delirium. Whatever was at the root of his Poem of Fire, it undeniably appears as a unique musical piece, and this is also true from a "art-crossing" point of view. Osbert Sitwell, George Bernard Shaw, and John Singer Sargent, who all attended the Premiere of Prometheus in 1914 in London, were in awe of Scriabin's unique creation.

Although, at the beginning of his career as a composer, Scriabin's model was Chopin, his style evolved dramatically over time and through the developing of his theosophical

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[490] Scriabin left 72 orchestral-size pages of sketches for an introductory composition (known as Prefatory Action) whose aim was to prepare mankind for the *Mysterium* and the ensuing Apocalypse. The fragments of the piece were assembled by Alexander Nemtin, who attempted to re-create it. The resulting piece was played by the pianist Alexei Lubimov under the conductors Cyril Kondrashin in Moscow and Vladimir Ashkenazy in Berlin in 1996.

and Symbolist ideas, which led him to a very personal and peerless compositional style and to atonality. However, perhaps because Scriabin's persona and work were inseparable, the passage to atonality came gradually and naturally, and was completely integrated in Scriabin's musical expression. In his last orchestral works, the composer developed an obsessive fascination for a mystic chord, also named the Promethean chord, and, which, not surprisingly, is at the heart of Prometheus.[491] The fundamental chord in question is formed by the six following notes: C, F#, B*b*, E, A, and D. Its very special sonority can be accounted for through the association of two fourths, one pure and one augmented, with the tritone (also famously named *diabolus in musica*). We can concur with what Hugh Macdonald says about the Promethean chord, for which, "mystic is not a bad epithet, especially with its unintentional suggestion of mist, since the harmony seems to float motionless, despite heaving and fluttering and recurrent attempts to animate this timeless music".[492] In spite of the two titles given to Scriabin's orchestral work, Prometheus or The Poem of Fire, it is very far from being a symphonic poem, and it would be pointless to try and find a precise narrative about Prometheus within the musical piece. However, the piece is very atmospheric, and we know from Scriabin himself that the aspect of Prometheus he was interested in dealing with was the relationship of the Titan with mankind, and the fact that he elevated them from their bestial level by offering them the flame of knowledge. Given the aim of Scriabin's Mysterium, we could assume, without being too adventurous, that he identified with Prometheus, since he himself wanted to bring back mankind to spiritual harmony through cosmic regeneration. In our analysis of Prometheus, we shall rely on

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491 The mystic chord first appeared in the middle of Scriabin's Fifth Sonata.

492 In Skryabin, by Hugh Macdonald, Oxford Studies of Composers, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, p.55

the Eulenburg edition,[493] with an introduction by Faubion Bowers which methodically states what symbolism Scriabin imputed to his music.

Scriabin had a very peculiar and mathematical way of structuring his works, but unfortunately, he never explained what his proceedings were. Even though Prometheus has a complex internal structure, its general form is tripartite.[494] The most fundamental aspect of the piece is probably its orchestration, which contributes greatly to the atmosphere of Prometheus as well as to its Symbolism. The piece was written for a very large orchestra, for quadruple woodwind, eight horns, five trumpets, percussions (including a tam-tam), strings, piano, organ, and a wordless chorus. At the opening of the work, in the introduction to the piece, only the woodwinds, strings, percussions and the brass can be heard, forming the famous mystic chord,[495] representing the original chaos. After the statement of the main theme ('Creative Principle') by the horns, open fourths played by muted trumpets (bars 21-25) symbolise Prometheus' gift of Fire, whereas at bar 222, a solo trumpet plays the 'theme of Will'. From that bar until the end of their intervention, bar 25, "the muted trumpets repeat their spur to action and their seesaw symbolises the descent of spirit into matter followed by the ascent of earth into heaven or the soul into after-life".[496] Thus, in this introduction, the main themes of the work together with the main elemental and symbolic forces which will be at the centre of the piece are already presented, and the different instruments or parts of the orchestra are attributed a symbolic function.

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[493] Prometheus or the Poem of Fire (0p.60), by Alexander Scriabin, Eulenburg, London, 1980

[494] For a complete structural, motivic, and harmonic analysis of the Poem of Fire, refer to The Music of Alexander Scriabin, by James M. Baker, 1986, pp.235-267

[495] The mystic chord never appears as a melodic motive

[496] In the introduction by Faubion Bowers, Prometheus, the Poem of Fire, by Alexander Scriabin, Eulenburg, London, 1980, p. III

The exposition as such starts at bar 26 with the 'Dawn of consciousness' theme, first given by the flutes and horns. At bar 30 enters the piano, which there again, is attributed a specific function, since it represents Man, as opposed to the orchestra, which represents the Cosmos. From bar 99 ("Avec Délice"),[497] Bowers suggests that "Scriabin's eroticism appears",[498] an assumption which would be confirmed at bar 105 with the indication "avec un intence [sic] désir".[499] Bowers carries on saying that "trills suggest sexual ecstasy, ravishment, pleasure and delight –in this instance Man's self-discovery".[500] What appears as particularly interesting is the fact that the piano, still representing Man, plays the 'Creative Principle' theme at bar 131, in a significantly symbolic way. Moreover, the theme is given a perfect fourth higher, in order to highlight that "Matter has ascended into Spirit".[501] From then on, the 'Creative Principle' theme is revealingly renamed 'Ego' by Scriabin. At bar 146, the atmosphere of 'softness' becomes "sourd[e], menaçant[e]",[502] when two trumpets play a perfect fourth "which says *ya yesm* (I am)".[503] Thus, thanks to the gift of Fire, Man goes from self-discovery and inarticulated ecstasy to the very affirmation of this newly found identity.

In the development, starting at bar 193, Scriabin essentially exploits this new motif, in order to explore and express the new horizon open to Man thanks to such a discovery.

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[497] "With delight". My translation

[498] Indeed, ecstasy, according to Scriabin, was one of the keys to cosmic regeneration, and he often compared the relationship of his audience with his music as an act of love, understood as a form of trance.

[499] "With intense desire". My translation

[500] In the introduction by Faubion Bowers, Prometheus, the Poem of Fire, by Alexander Scriabin, Eulenburg, London, 1980, p. IV

[501] *Ibid.*

[502] "muffled, threatening". My translation.

[503] In the introduction by Faubion Bowers, Prometheus, the Poem of Fire, by Alexander Scriabin, Eulenburg, London, 1980, p. IV

From bar 235, Scriabin evokes Man's "conquering of fears through defiance",[504] which, at bar 355, leads to Man's victory, "over himself and God through action, activity, self-discovery, experience and mystical ritual, which is celebrated with 'Dance of Life' theme, exposed by the piano at bar 393.

Eventually, the chorus enters in an apotheosis to start the Coda (bar 449). Man, which so far was represented as an abstraction, because of his conquests and elaboration of civilisation, is now Mankind, which allows the cosmic regeneration to take place: the 'Cosmic Dance of Atoms' starts at bar 510. Then, borrowing Scriabin's own words to describe the conclusion of his unique words, Bowers states: "All contours of themes shatter and splinter. The world of men is dematerialised and disintegrated into the cosmic dust of Nirvana. Man's incarnated Spirit is re-released into the æther as pure disembodiment. Wind- and star-swept it is blown by solar winds and galactic orgasms of ecstasy into the blue nothingness of the void".[505] The Symbolism at stake in Prometheus, with a great emphasis on the relationship between Matter and Spirit, certainly reflects the ideas of theosophy, but is also an astonishing attempt to conjure up one's visions.

We can see how the tripartite form of the work serves the purpose of Prometheus. Indeed, the interest of such a structure is that it emphasizes the chronological evolution at the heart of the piece. The recapitulation actually appears as an apotheosis, and only then does the chorus enter, thus underlining its symbolic and programmatic value within the work. Indeed, the chorus, mankind, is awoken to civilisation thanks to Prometheus' gift of fire. It is particularly significant, in this respect, that the mystic

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[504] *Ibid.*
[505] *Ibid.*

chord resolves itself at the end of Prometheus in a glorious F# major, which is also the only triad in the Poem of Fire. Therefore the musical piece changes from a mystic, eternal and indefinite suspension to a very clear-cut harmony meant to represent the origin and triumph of civilisation, and its essential place within temporality.

One of the most interesting aspects of Alexander Scriabin's work resides in the effective use he made of synaesthesia in his work. Hugh Macdonald puts forward the idea that Scriabin's application of that principle derives from a conversation that he had with Rimsky Korsakov, "finding, [...] in 1907, that they both associated colour with pitch, albeit different ones".[506] Thus, in Prometheus, Scriabin used a corresponding colour for each harmony, which resulted in the following correspondences, interestingly presented by Scriabin under the form of a series of fifths here represented in a circular way together with the meaning Scriabin imputed to them (Fig.31)[507]:

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[506] In Skryabin, by Hugh Macdonald, Oxford Studies of Composers, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, p.56

[507] In Prometheus, the Poem of Fire, by Alexander Scriabin, Eulenburg, London, 1980, p.1

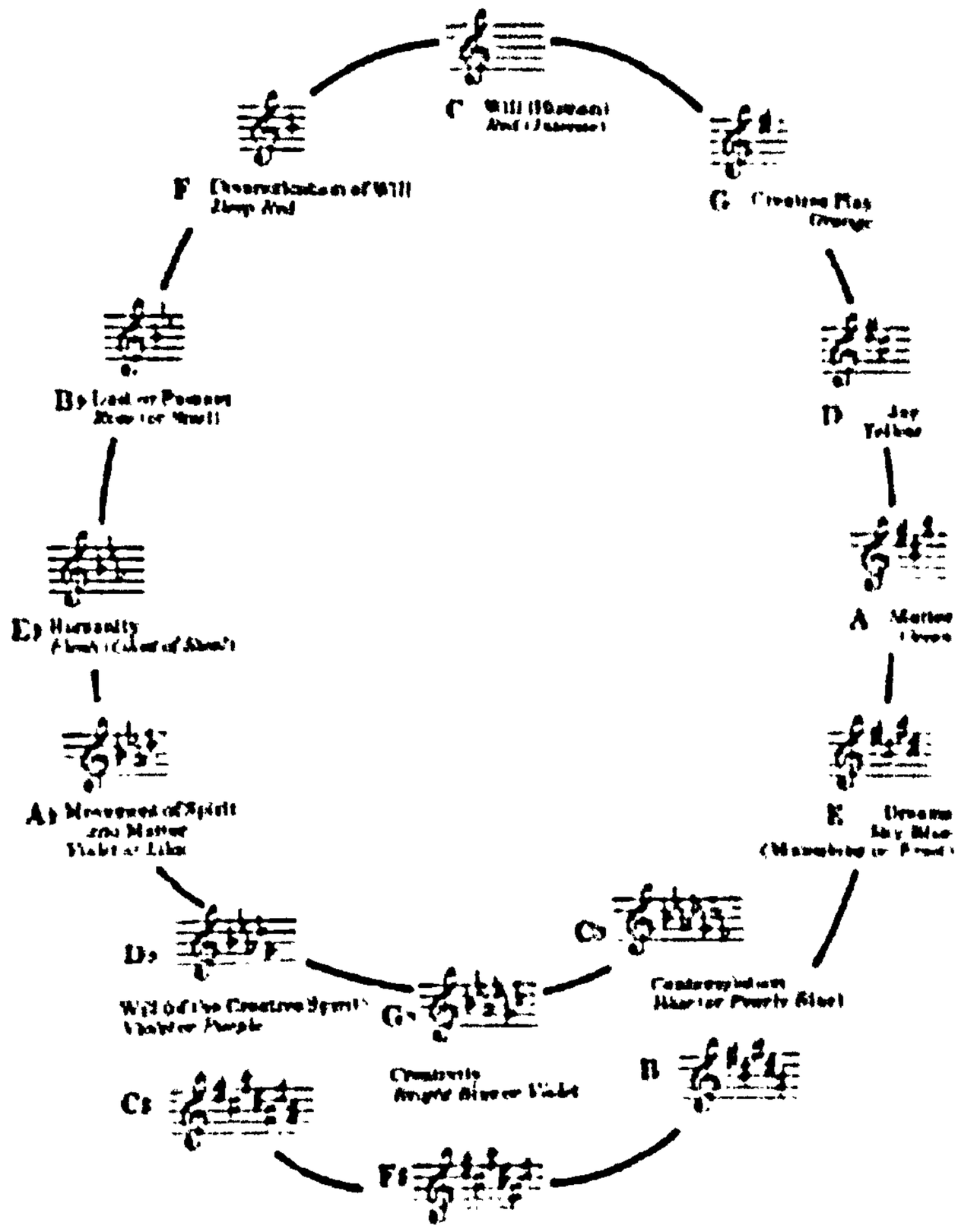

Fig.31

When Scriabin started composing Prometheus, no such device as a colour organ existed, and, indeed, he never actually saw his vision materialised. But, by the time that the work was played in London, a 'Tastiéra per luce' (keyboard of lights) had been conceived to fulfill Scriabin's wish. As Hugh Macdonald explains, "the music is in two parts, one part giving notes (colours) that change very slowly, ten times in all, each one lasting about two minutes, The second part reflects the harmonic patterns of the music, the note (colour) corresponding to the harmonic "tonic" at any given moment, and so it

changes constantly, sometimes very rapidly",[508] which explains why the very notations on the score are divided into an upper and a lower part indicating the colour base. The major issue with such a table of correspondences and with the fact that the "tastiéra per luce" was altogether rather rudimentary, is that the succession of colours could not be a reflection of the rich harmonies created by Scriabin. This was increased by the fact that both B and E were pale blue, and E *b* and B *b*, steel (with only slight variations in colours). To that, Hugh Macdonald adds the fact that "our aural perception of music is a great deal more advanced than our visual perception of colour, so that the simple reiteration of one colour every time a certain harmonic center recurs has no dynamic value compared with that of music: steel-grey on page one is the same experience as steel-grey on page ten".[509] Leonid Sabaneev, musicologist, friend and biographer of Alexander Scriabin, wrote an account of the use of light in Prometheus,[510] and we can find in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France a copy of a score belonging to Sabaneev, which had been annotated by Scriabin in the restaurant Praga, in Moscow, in March 1913. This gives many indications of what the composer intended to realise from a lighting point of view. They allow us to understand how he visualised his work and how he linked colours to certain atmospheres (instead of tempi, Scriabin used poetical French terms describing atmospheres or moods), but they are not really enlightening regarding the synaesthetic value of The Poem of Fire.

However, one aspect appears as particularly striking in relation to the association of the Symbolism of music and colours. Indeed, according to Scriabin's indications, the

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[508] *Ibid.*, p.57
[509] *Ibid.*, p.56
[510] Interestingly, it was published under the title "Prometheus von Skrjabin", in Kandinsky's Almanach der Blaue Reiter, Munich, Piper, 1912. Kandinsky himself translated the article from the Russian.

work finishes in bright blue, a colour which represents the triumph of mankind. In this respect, it is particularly fruitful to notice that the bright blue of creativity, symbolically conquered by Man after his self-discovery (let us bear in mind that the 'Creative Principle' is renamed 'ego' when this appropriation takes place), overcomes the red colour that had remained dominant in the development of the tripartite form, precisely when the 'I am' played on the piano struggles against the rest of the orchestra (the Cosmos). If we take into account the fact that the work starts on the mystic chord, whose mystery largely relies on its fundamental tritone C-F#, and that the work concludes on a frank F# major, we can put forward the idea that the synthesis of light, colour and music had a symbolic value. The red colour, on the side of the Will and elemental forces, is eventually overcome by the blue, on the side of mankind and civilization, and Spirit, a fundamental opposition of primary colours already seen in Frantisek Kupka's works on Prometheus. In this respect, even if the synaesthesias perceived by Scriabin were originally relying on his individual perception, it appears that his symbolic and art-crossing vision had a striking consistency.

Alexander Scriabin's dream of a Total work of art, more than the dream of a fusion between different arts and the production of a symbiotic effect, revealed an ambition to create a fusion between the artwork and the world. Through the tangible application of the principle of synaesthesias to a work of art, associated with the figure of Prometheus, the Titan took on a new symbolic significance. Indeed, with the import of scientific theories deriving from the theory of vibrations, the existence of correspondences and synaesthesias seemed to be given a valid proof, and the cosmic regeneration dreamt of by the Symbolists then appeared as a tangible possibility. An unexpected reconciliation between two antagonistic interpretations of Prometheus was

thus witnessed. The materialistic, positivist image of the Titan, representing the unlimited power of science – which dominated during the twentieth century and which is still prevalent nowadays – was brought together with the Symbolist one, inherited from Romantic*ism*, for which Prometheus was, above all, an embodiment of idealism and spirituality. With the Symbolists improbable and somehow fanciful appropriation of scientific theories, the Symbolist crisis was somehow soothed through a reconciliation with the spirit of modernity. That, together the the crude and vivid reality of the first world war soon turned the page of Symbolism.

To conclude, I would like to turn towards a monumental work on Prometheus published in 1922, which appears both as a description of what happened to the mythological figure after Symbolism, and as a description of the fortune of Symbolism itself. Written by Elémir Bourges, is the product of a lifetime: Bourges spent almost 30 years working on his gigantic poem, which is fed by Symbolism, but goes beyond it, and the subject of the present thesis. However, this work looks back on Symbolism with precious hindsight. At the beginning of La Nef, Prometheus, full of optimism, awaits his deliverance, and announces that, when it comes, a cosmogony and a new world will soon arise. But the Symbolist dream does not come true. The void left by Zeus in the world after he is overthrown only gives way to despair and horror. Prometheus' flame is extinguished, and his son, the new man, is blind. The tone of La Nef is evidently very pessimistic, probably because of the death of Bourges' beloved daughter, and, more evidently, because of the First World War, but it is fascinating to notice that Bourges chose the figure of the Titan to express what he saw as the failure of Symbolism, and the fact that its idealistic fore-world was doomed. La Nef, through Prometheus, expresses the idea that the hopes of Symbolism were a delusion. Harley Granville Barker, in The Madras House,[511] also chose the figure of Prometheus to express the failure of a retreat into art. Prometheus, in any case, was the key to that world, thanks to his creative power and/or his sacrifice. If we consider the last Symbolist works on Prometheus treated in this thesis, those of Scriabine and Kupka, the suffering of Prometheus was no longer emphasised. Prometheus was a triumphant figure, and Symbolism appeared as a path towards modernism.

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[511] In The Madras House, by Harley Granville Barker, Eyre Methuen Ltd, London, 1910, 1925, pp.128-129 and pp. 152-153

Thus, from being a trickster, with Hesiod, and from being the one to blame for the evils endured by mankind, Prometheus became a positive figure on which hopes relied. The first step towards this new perception of Prometheus was surely Prometheus Bound, even though this sole remaining element from a trilogy was surely not intended as a glorification of Prometheus against Zeus. Indeed, a reconciliation between the Titan and Zeus almost undoubtedly ended Æschylus' work. The decisive moment in the history of the Prometheus myth really occurred with Johann Wolfgang Goethe and the *Sturm und Drang*, when Goethe made of Prometheus a man, or at least the archetype of man. Artists became fascinated with the double origin of Prometheus, both man and god, and for the first time in the history of the myth, started considering the relationship between Prometheus and the beneficiaries of his sacrifice, mankind. From then on, he was no longer a mythical character as such: he was not a god fighting another god any more, and the notion of hubris, which had always been essential in the understanding of the myth, started to fade in favour of the heroism of Prometheus' act. The notion of guilt disappears. Prometheus becomes the champion of mankind, the voice of the oppressed against an arbitrary and capricious power. Even more importantly, Prometheus claims his own creative power, his ability to create from inner forms (which is also the aesthetic credo of the *Sturm und Drang*), rather than to imitate the Creation itself. From a myth, Prometheus becomes a symbol of freedom: freedom from guilt, and freedom in creation. Despite a revival of interest in the Prometheus figure during the Renaissance, the real glory was engendered by Goethe's ode, and was developed during the nineteenth century.

We cannot deny that the talent and power of Goethe's expression allowed the European societies of the time to measure and project themselves on the Prometheus

myth, which seemed to give shape to their concerns in a perfect way. It seems that, after being in the shadow since the seventeenth century, the Prometheus myth was ready to be considered in a new light. The German poet allowed Prometheus' voice to be heard, and to become a human symbol, the harbinger of mankind. Goethe first inspired some of the most famous musicians of his time: Schubert and, indirectly, Beethoven. Romanticism soon adopted the Prometheus figure: in an ode, Byron made of the benefactor of mankind a Romantic hero and model, ready to push his sacrifice to its limits, "making death a victory". However, after Goethe, it is surely Percy Bysshe Shelley's Prometheus Unbound which had the strongest impact on the evolution of the Prometheus figure, and had a decisive influence on the way in which Symbolist artists later interpreted Prometheus. Shelley was actually the first to explore the full extent of Prometheus' creative power, a power relying on the Word, and entailing a cosmogony. The fortune of Prometheus as the key to a new world was born, and was soon widely developed. In France, the use of the Prometheus figure adopted a different angle, since the creative power of the Titan caused a direct association with the figure of the artist. Such an approach was not new, since Piero di Cosimo had already made of Prometheus the representation of the artist, but it took new dimensions from Romanticism, especially with Victor Hugo, who almost obsessively established a parallel between Prometheus and himself as a poet. It has to be said that he also projected on the figure of the Titan that of the outlaw, with which Hugo, again, largely identified. Interestingly, Honoré de Balzac also used Prometheus as a model for the artist, but did so for different reasons. Prometheus, according to him, was the symbol of the artist because of his creative power, and his ability to give life to his creations. Balzac's own aesthetic ideals were therefore projected on Prometheus, since Balzac's

ultimate project, with La Comédie Humaine, was to create a tangible society as such, and to be God in relation with his own characters. Prometheus thus increasingly appeared as the symbol for an alternative world, but a world which would be governed by mankind, thanks to their newly accepted creative power. In the case of Hugo and Balzac, this alternative world was a metaphor for the work of art. It is also important to notice that Balzac's interpretation of Prometheus as the representation of an aesthetic credo was already cross-fertilised with the Pygmalion myth, and that the heirs of Romanticism, Symbolist artists, would fully explore that parallel.

There was no real breaking-point between Romanticism and Symbolism, which appeared as a further exploration of the Romantic concerns, but a major factor shaped the state of mind of Symbolism, and gave an even greater impetus to the interpretations of Prometheus. Indeed, the general "crisis of faith", at the very heart of Symbolism, resulted in the elaboration of a complex syncretism which appeared as a spiritual substitute for the lost faith of Symbolist artists. This crisis was more or less intense across Europe, according to the various political and religious contexts, and the way in which the industrial revolution had developed. In France and Belgium, where the religious factor played an important role within Symbolism, the double nature of Prometheus, both human and god, was crucial for his apprehension. Indeed, even though Symbolist artists rejected Christianity, they had an incredible thirst for spirituality, and Prometheus soon became identified with Jesus Christ, with whom he shared a human side. Jesus Christ was actually still glorified by Symbolist artists, but only in specific passages of the Bible, like the episode on the Mount of Olives, when he appears like a man abandoned by God. In this respect, Prometheus appeared as an ideal figure for Symbolism: like Jesus Christ, he loved mankind, and was part of it. He

had sacrificed himself for it, but at the same time, he was not linked to the notion of human guilt, and, most of all, was a pagan figure. That combined with the fact that he was an image of the artist, offering an alternative vision of the world, soon made of Prometheus a key Symbolist figure, like Orpheus, who, for different reasons, was also associated with Jesus Christ, and was an iconic representation of the artist.

In the German Reich, the religious concerns were not as strong as the issue of cultural and political unification, and the focus adopted on Prometheus was deeply influenced by the interpretations of philosophers such as Marx, but more importantly Nietzsche, who was a truly Symbolist philosopher. The two men both saw in Prometheus the figure of a conqueror freed from the gods, ignoring the notion of guilt, and who, therefore, had an unlimited creative power. Even though Marx and Nietzsche had very different philosophies and systems of thought, both emphasised in Prometheus the representation of Man freed from his own chimeras, endowed with the power of self-awareness, and facing boundless possibilities. There again, in a very different context, Prometheus was at the centre of an alternative world or realm, that of mankind. Thus, even when Prometheus was depicted enduring his horrendous punishment, Symbolist painters such as Gustave Moreau and Arnold Böcklin either represented the Titan with a determined look, his eyes clearly turned towards a new world, or surrounded by an atmospheric landscape announcing a new cosmogony. There was surely an identification of Symbolist artists with Prometheus, fighting base matter, and therefore the world they despised. Such a focus on the myth was particularly clear in England, where Symbolism was on the side of Aestheticism, and where Prometheus, through a *mise en abyme*, appeared under the mask of the artist Pygmalion. However, Prometheus' symbolic value was deeper, since within the Symbolist syncretism, he

was the key to the ideal fore-world, the Symbolist ultimate goal. Unlike artists from the previous generation, such as Balzac or Hugo, the alternative world Prometheus represented was not only a metaphor for artistic creation. Interestingly, whereas some Symbolist artists, especially in France and Belgium, turned towards the godlike side of Prometheus to satisfy their thirst of spirituality, German-speaking artists rather turned towards his human side to dream of Arcadia.

Prometheus thus gradually became associated with what, according to Symbolists, also led to this ideal realm, namely correspondences and synaesthesia. Klinger's cycle on Prometheus, Brahms Fantasy, was already sustained by this idea. But when Symbolism was later enriched with the discovery of new theories, notably that of vibration fields and theosophy, the fore-world was seen in a new light, correspondences being suddenly understood as tangible and rational facts. Concurrently, Prometheus also took an even greater importance. Until then, he embodied an alternative vision of the world: linked to an idealist world order, he had represented the possibility of a new cosmos, opposed to the materialistic reality entailed by the Industrial Revolution. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the allegory of Prometheus representing omnipotent science and the so far antagonistic Symbolist interpretations of the Titan surprisingly met. In fact, "scientific" theories seemed to justify and fulfil the Symbolists' idealistic aspirations. The works of Kupka and Scriabin show the concentration of Symbolist faith and ideals onto the figure of Prometheus, who appears as an embodiment of a pure human form, taming the force of matter and who, by doing so, appropriates the world. This had a tremendous consequence for the interpretation of Prometheus, as well as for Symbolist dreams. The issue was no longer to access the ideal fore-world, but to shape and create the world to the image of the Ideal.

Prometheus thus became a symbol of the reconciliation between artists and the world, and proved to be a key to resolve the Symbolist crisis of faith. The Symbolists modelled and projected their aspirations onto the Prometheus symbol, a prism filtering both the image of the Symbolist artist and their vision of the world. The protean Prometheus, Symbolist figure par excellence, thus led them to Modernism.

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